

DESTINATION WETLANDS

Supporting sustainable tourism



Cover page:

Top photo: Photographers in the Danube Delta
©Courtesy of Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority

Bottom left: Bangweulu Swamps, Zambia
©Zambia Wildlife Authority;

bottom right: Black-necked Crane
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DESTINATION WETLANDS
Supporting sustainable tourism



*Great White Pelicans
in the Danube Delta*
©Peter Lengyel

1. Snowy egret, California, USA
© Klaus von Schwanebach

2. Birdwatching in the Laguna
Lancanelo Ramsar Site in Argentina
© Heber Sosa



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1. Horses in Pestersko polje
Ramsar Site in Serbia
© Dragana Cavlovic



2. Palau
©Nick Davidson



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TALEB RIFAI *UNWTO SECRETARY GENERAL*

Tourism is an extraordinary phenomenon of our times: one billion tourists are expected to cross international borders in 2012. Another four billion domestic tourists travel within their own countries every year. The need to travel, to know different cultures, to meet people from other continents, to be in contact with nature, is now ingrained in the culture of our modern society. Tourism is at the same time a driver and a consequence of globalization. As a major economic sector, it is often the main source of income for developing countries, creating jobs and opportunities particularly for the vulnerable segments of the population.

The continuous expansion of tourism, while constituting an effective tool to promote growth and development, requires careful management. We need to ensure that we maximize the economic and social benefits of this immense sector while at the same time addressing its potential negative impacts on the environment and on our common heritage. Making tourism more sustainable is at the core of the World Tourism

Organization's (UNWTO) mandate. As the UN specialized agency in the field of tourism we work to promote the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

The recent UN Green Economy report confirms what UNWTO has been long advocating – that increased investment in sustainable tourism can boost the sector's contribution to economic growth, development and particularly job creation, while also addressing major environmental challenges.

UNWTO and the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in February 2010 as the starting point for effective and fruitful cooperation. Our organizations share a vision of the value of wetlands, of the importance of their conservation and wise use, and of the benefits that sustainable tourism can generate. I am particularly pleased with the designation of 'Wetlands, Tourism and Recreation' as the theme of Ramsar's 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Bucharest,

Romania, and that World Wetland Day in 2012 was dedicated to the theme of "Wetlands and Tourism, a great experience".

Every year, millions of tourists see and experience the wonders of nature in the wetlands, which constitute one of tourism's greatest assets and a unique setting for many tourism activities. A great number of the world's wetlands are in developing countries. Sustainable tourism can generate not only revenues for their conservation, but also income and livelihoods for the communities, thus contributing to poverty alleviation.

I trust that this joint publication between UNWTO and the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention will be a step forward in raising awareness of the close relationships between wetlands and tourism and in promoting good practices and recommendations on how they can achieve mutual benefits.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Taleb Rifai". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



ANADA TIEGA RAMSAR SECRETARY GENERAL

The year 2012 marks the first time that the Ramsar Convention has formally addressed tourism in relation to wetlands at a Conference of the Parties, and it is fitting that this is taking place in partnership with the world's leading authority on sustainable tourism, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world's ecosystems, providing a diversity of ecosystem services that sustain our lives. This includes 'cultural' ecosystem services, such as the aesthetic, recreational, and spiritual values manifested by many wetlands, and it is these services that go far to explain the popularity of wetlands as tourist destinations attracting millions of visitors each year.

Wetlands offer significant tourism opportunities that can be a key source of income for many developing countries, bringing economic benefits to national and local economies and contributing to local livelihoods. There is evidence too that well-managed, sustainable tourism can contribute to wetland conservation and wise use as

well. Yet within the Convention we know only too well the challenges of unsustainable tourism, the potential damage to wetland ecosystems and local economies through the uncontrolled development of tourism infrastructure, inappropriate tourist behaviour, and poorly conceived tourism strategies, policies and plans.

As this publication draws upon the UNWTO's long experience in the field of tourism, we hope too that readers will also make practical use of the UNWTO definition of 'sustainable tourism', which shares with Ramsar's 'wise use principle' the aim of maintaining ecological processes, as well as the recognition of cultural values and traditional knowledge and the importance of creating opportunities to sustain and improve livelihoods, especially for those living in poverty.

We hope that readers will learn much from the 14 case studies whose authors have shared their successes – and sometimes their failures – in managing tourism in and around wetlands. We believe that the array of issues encountered through these practical experiences from Ramsar

Sites and other wetlands will help management authorities and others to foster sustainable tourism in their countries, and to raise awareness about the vital role of our precious wetland resources. As this publication goes to press, representatives of the Ramsar member countries are preparing for the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, set for Bucharest, Romania, in July 2012, the theme of which, "Wetlands, Tourism, and Recreation", indicates the importance that they attach to these matters.

As we noted in our World Wetlands Day focus on tourism in February of this year, wetland tourism can be 'a great experience'. Let us hope that these lessons in managing sustainable tourism can be put to good use by our readers and that wetland tourism will indeed be a great experience for tourists, local communities, and the wetlands themselves!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AT', written in a stylized, cursive script.



*Ernest Coe Visitor centre at the Everglades National Park
© National Park Service Photo, Rodney Cammauf*

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Cypress and Great Egret in the Everglades, USA
© National Park Service Photos, Rodney Cammauf

SUMMARY

Wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world's ecosystems, providing services such as water, food, construction materials, transport, and coastline protection, as well as important opportunities for tourism and recreation, which are also defined as 'ecosystem services'. The scale of tourism at the global level is impressive. In 2012, international tourism is expecting to reach 1 billion international arrivals and is forecast to rise to 1.8 billion by 2030. Thus the tourism phenomenon can be expected to continue to expand as more people in more countries around the world have growing affluence and time to travel. Domestic tourism is even more significant than international, with estimates pointing to 4 billion domestic tourists worldwide.

Wetlands are a significant part of the global tourism experience and are likely therefore also to be a key part of the expansion in demand for tourism locations. People are naturally attracted to water, to coastal wetlands such as coral reefs and beaches, and to inland wetlands such as lakes and rivers, reflecting the strong bond between people and nature as well as the unique aesthetic appeal of wetlands.

The Ramsar Convention has only recently formally addressed wetland tourism, recognizing

the increased demands for tourism expansion and the potential negative impacts on the health of wetlands, but also understanding that, if managed sustainably, tourism can bring many benefits, environmental, social and economic. To set a framework for managing tourism in and around wetlands, the UN World Tourism Organization's definition of sustainable tourism is an important tool for the Convention in applying sustainable practices in wetlands. Using this definition, sustainable tourism shares the same aim of maintaining ecological character as 'wise use' as defined by the Convention. At the time of writing, it is hoped that this approach will be included as part of a Resolution on tourism and wetlands to be adopted by the Convention's Contracting Parties when they meet in July 2012.

Fourteen wetland case studies form the core of this publication and were selected to exemplify both the diversity of wetland types around the world and the diversity in the scale of wetland tourism in Wetlands of International Importance (or 'Ramsar Sites'), and to illustrate effective approaches in managing tourism for the wetland sector. This information is particularly addressed to wetland management authorities but should also be relevant to many others.

Tourism in wetlands offers many positive opportunities at the national, regional and local levels but also many challenges as well. The opportunities can include economic benefits to national and local economies, support for local livelihoods and local cultures, and, importantly, support for wetland conservation, too. The case studies illustrate well the challenges encountered in wetland tourism – the impacts on wetlands from the development and operation of tourism facilities, such as degradation of wetland areas for extraction of building materials, infrastructures, over-abstraction of water, inappropriate waste disposal, and so on, as well as the direct impact of tourists on wetland ecosystems through noise pollution, excessive trampling, disturbance of wild species, amongst others.

This publication also refers to already existing guidelines, including Ramsar's wise use guidelines, and to other available materials that are generally relevant to tourism management but not necessarily specifically focused on wetlands. A range of such materials are cited throughout the text and compiled in Chapter 7.



*Nature trail in the wilderness
core area of Kuresoo, Estonia
©Mati Kose*

Based on the case studies and other examples, a set of key messages have been identified and summarized opposite. For more detail on these messages, readers are encouraged to go beyond this summary and read the more detailed experiences in the main text of the publication and to go further yet again by consulting the full texts on each case study, which are available online at **www.ramsar.org/tourism**.

KEY MESSAGES

Managing tourism in and around wetlands

- Wetland management planning and plans are essential tools for resolving the multiple issues arising from activities in wetlands, including tourism.
- Development plans for tourism should be integrated with wetland management plans for biodiversity conservation and compatible with the objectives for conservation and wise use of each site.
- Negative impacts from existing and future tourism activities can be minimized by appropriate management planning and monitoring.
- Meaningful involvement of local communities in decision making is a central element of both wetland wise use and successful tourism.
- Well-managed tourism development in and around wetlands ensures that benefits accrue to local communities and contribute to sustainable livelihoods.
- Dialogue among different stakeholders is central to determining what a destination can offer sustainably, what its communities will accept, and what its businesses can offer in light of the market demand for tourism and visitor satisfaction.
- Offering enriching experiences at wetlands is important for attracting tourists but needs careful planning to ensure that visitation rates and activities are ecologically and socially sustainable.
- Communication and education about wetlands help to raise awareness about wetland values and wetland biodiversity, and win support from tourists and others for wetland conservation.

Working with the tourism sector

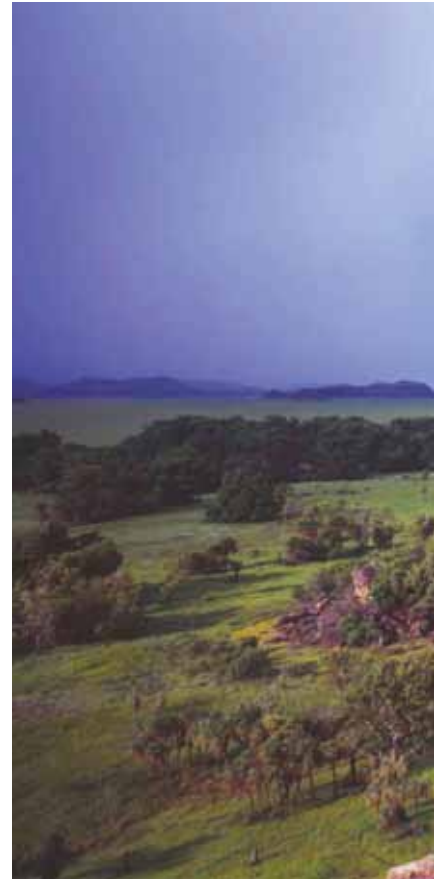
- Understanding how the tourism sector works helps when planning for a development of tourism that is both commercially viable and compatible with wetland conservation.
- Working with the tourism sector at a wetland destination is the best way to ensure the right mix of resources and skills for tourism and conservation.
- Effective interaction between tourism and wetland conservation occurs where the overlap between the mutual interest of each sector is identified through dialogue.
- Support by wetland managers for local businesses and communities to help them better provide local tourism services brings important long-term conservation benefits.
- Tour operators promote those sites where visitors receive good experiences and services: high quality guiding and interpretation of a site can play an important part in achieving those results.
- Tourism potential is heavily influenced by considerations of access.
- Provision of facilities for visitors can be used to control where tourism takes place within a site and so help to minimize adverse impacts.
- Marketing and promotion are important for attracting visitors, but they need to be compatible with the types and levels of tourism that can be supported without adverse impacts at a site.

Planning and policies

- National, regional and local planning and policies are key factors in environmental conservation and in ensuring that tourism contributes equitably to the development of local economy.
- Well-conceived national and local policies for tourism are crucial and must fit comfortably within wider strategic policies related to land use.
- Appropriate legislation and its effective enforcement is important to prevent damage to the environment and to tourism assets, to protect the rights of host communities and enable them to benefit from tourism, and to ensure that the future development of tourism is only permitted where it will be sustainable.

WHAT ARE WETLANDS?

Wetlands are broadly defined under the Ramsar Convention and include rivers, lakes, ponds, mangroves, coral reefs, reservoirs, mudflats, sandy beaches, salt pans... and more. They include areas that can be coastal or inland, natural or artificial.



1. INTRODUCTION

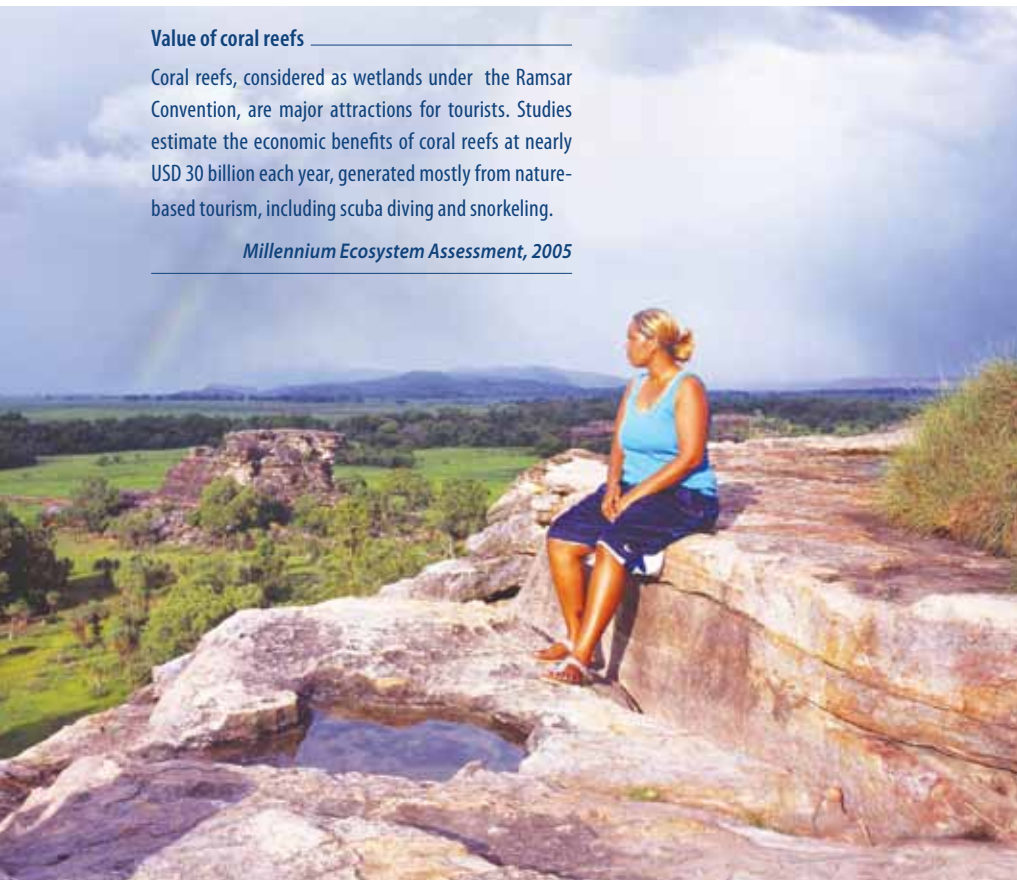
1.1 WETLANDS AND TOURISM

Wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world's ecosystems. They provide essential services for people such as water, food, construction materials, transport, coastline protection – as well as a place for tourism and recreation. Worldwide, wetlands offer significant opportunities for tourism and recreation, generating income for governments, for the tourism industry itself, and for local communities as well.

Value of coral reefs

Coral reefs, considered as wetlands under the Ramsar Convention, are major attractions for tourists. Studies estimate the economic benefits of coral reefs at nearly USD 30 billion each year, generated mostly from nature-based tourism, including scuba diving and snorkeling.

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005



*Kakadu is a living cultural landscape, home to Aboriginal people for more than 50,000 years
©Peter Eve, Tourism NT*

People are naturally attracted to water, to coastal wetlands such as coral reefs and beaches, and to inland wetlands such as lakes and rivers. This reflects strong bonds between people and nature as well as the unique aesthetic appeal of wetlands. Wetlands and their wildlife are indeed a key part of the global tourism experience, from mass tourism to specialist tourism in small groups.

Yet as with any natural resource, the world's wetlands can be enjoyed by tourists today and tomorrow only if their visits are managed sustainably.

THE GLOBAL SCALE OF TOURISM

In 2012, there will be about one billion international tourist arrivals, rising to a predicted 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO 2011). Domestic tourism in many countries is likely to expand even faster. Economic activity generated by travel and tourism creates around 5% of global GDP and supports an estimated 6-7% of the world's jobs.

International tourism expenditure reached 1 trillion USD in 2011 (UNWTO press release, 7 May 2012). With half of all international tourists travelling to wetlands, especially to coastal areas, and the additional value of domestic tourism and recreational day trips, the economic value of wetland tourism is truly enormous.



1



2



3

1. Cayapas-Mataje Ecological Reserve, Ecuador
©Xavier Cornejo

2. School children taking part in environmental projects in la Conejera, Colombia
©FHLC

3. Aerial view of Abrohlos, Brazil
©Bernardete Barbosa

4. Biking around Ichkeul Lake, Tunisia
© Photos DGF

1.2 TOURISM AND THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

Although tourism in wetlands is a widespread activity, it has never been considered in detail by the Ramsar Convention. In July 2012, however, *Wetlands, Tourism and Recreation* will be the theme of Ramsar's 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Bucharest, Romania). For the first time the Convention will formally address tourism as one of the many 'ecosystem services' that wetlands deliver. The Conference will identify what countries need to do at national and local levels to ensure that wetland tourism is sustainable, consistent with the Convention's 'wise use' principle. It is hoped that by the time this publication has been launched, the Conference of the Parties will have adopted a Resolution on tourism and wetlands.

The Convention launched its focus on wetlands and tourism on February 2nd, World Wetlands Day 2012, with the slogan *Wetlands and Tourism, a Great Experience*. This campaign met with great enthusiasm, reflecting the importance of tourism in and around wetlands as a potential source of income both locally and nationally and as an opportunity to involve local communities in natural resource management.



1.3 ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication highlights the considerable value of wetlands for tourism and the economic benefits that tourism can bring for the management of wetland sites. There is a clear need to manage wetland tourism wisely through sound policies, planning, and awareness-raising – in other words, by putting the principles of sustainable tourism into action. Through case studies and other materials, this publication demonstrates the contributions that sustainable tourism practices in and around wetlands can make to conservation, poverty alleviation (through improvement of local livelihoods), regional and national economies, and support to local cultures. It also highlights the associated risks and impacts when tourism is not well managed and is not sustainable.

The publication also provides useful references to existing guidelines on sustainable tourism as well as to many other relevant materials on developing and managing sustainable tourism. It also notes, wherever appropriate, the relevant Ramsar guidance that could usefully be consulted. The publication should be relevant to wetland site managers and management authorities, tourism and wetland policy-makers and planners, and

the private sector (including those investing in, operating or developing tourism in and around wetlands).

The publication is not intended to promote tourism at Ramsar Sites or other wetlands. The decision to allow tourism activities at a site should always be carefully assessed by those responsible for managing the wetland based upon their conservation objectives for the site. It should always be made in accordance with Ramsar's wise use principles. Wetlands provide critical ecosystem services and the development of tourism might compromise other important services for humans. Managing such 'trade-offs' provides challenges for wetland decision makers.

For this publication, 14 case studies on tourism in wetlands, 13 of which are Ramsar Sites, have been selected to cover different wetland types around the world and to examine the diversity in the scale of tourism, the management processes in place, the many challenges encountered and, wherever possible, the management solutions employed.

WHAT IS A RAMSAR SITE?

A Ramsar Site, or Wetland of International Importance, is a wetland area designated under the Ramsar Convention by the national government of a Member State. Currently there are over 2,000 such sites covering over 192 million hectares: an impressive global network of wetlands that meet criteria related to their biodiversity and uniqueness.

These wetlands are not problem-free, however! As at many Ramsar Sites, the challenges that wetland managers face are diverse, and they include issues of water quantity and quality, overexploitation, the demand for drainage, and development for other land uses.

This publication presents lessons learned from the case studies to help answer the following questions:

- *What makes tourism successful and sustainable at individual wetland sites?*
- *What are the practical ways by which managers can ensure that tourism takes place in harmony with objectives for wetland conservation and wise use?*
- *How can wetland sites, tourism businesses and public authorities work together to achieve this?*

Everglades

UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA
621,000 ha

Freshwater and wet prairies, sub-tropical forests, saltmarshes, mangrove forests, beaches, dunes, brackish water estuaries

Danube Delta

ROMANIA
580,000 ha

River, delta, river and marine levees, floodplains, brackish lake and lagoon complex, beaches, dunes and coastal waters

Skocjan Caves

SLOVENIA
41,300 ha

River catchment with meadows, forests, floodplains, karst underground water cave system

Soomaa

ESTONIA
39,639 ha

Raised bogs, rivers, swamp forests, floodplain meadows

Ichkeul

TUNISIA
12,600 ha

Lake surrounded by Mediterranean scrub and forest

Humedal la Conejera

COLOMBIA
59 ha

River, marshland and forest enclave in urban area

Abrohlos Marine National Park

BRAZIL
91,300 ha
Coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangroves, beaches, sandbanks

Ibera Marshes

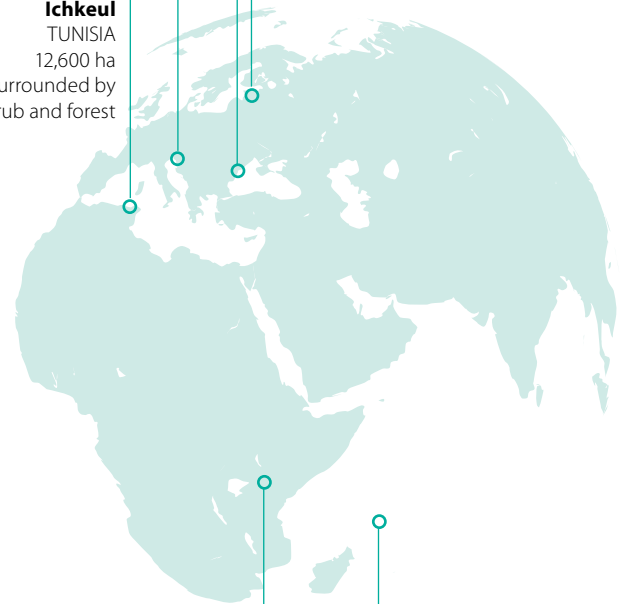
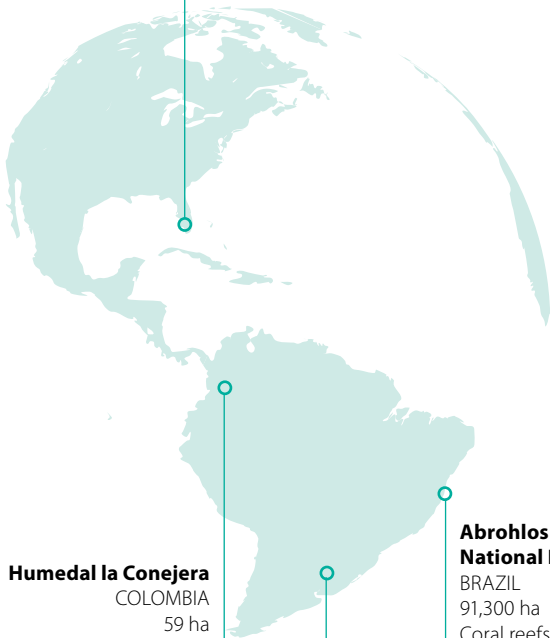
ARGENTINA
1,300,00 ha
Lakes, marshes, river and forests

Lake Nakuru

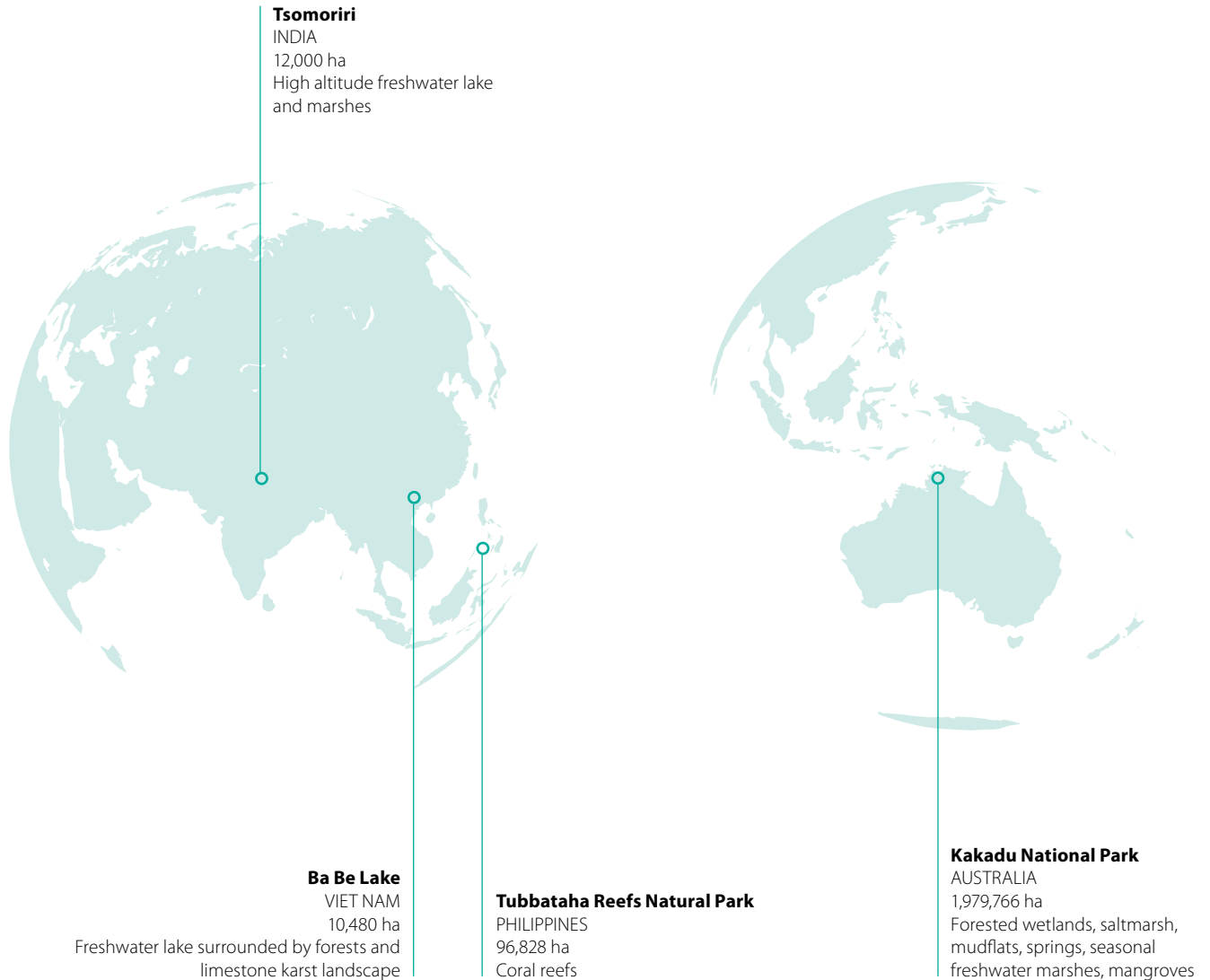
KENYA
18,800 ha
Shallow alkaline lake in an enclosed basin, surrounded by marshes, grassland and forest

Port Launay Wetland

SEYCHELLES
121 ha
Mangroves, mud flats and streams



This map shows the location of the 14 case studies sites. Further details about the size, wetland type and level of tourism at each location are shown in the table in the Annex. Case study texts are available at www.ramsar.org/tourism



2. WETLAND WISE USE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The need for a more sustainable tourism is now widely appreciated by the tourism sector: many leading and specialist tourism businesses are committed to working towards the greater sustainability of their enterprises. Sustainable tourism – and the concepts of ‘green tourism’ or ‘responsible tourism’ which are based on sustainable tourism principles - are of growing importance to tourists themselves and therefore for tourism marketing. Sustainability practices are key for tourism businesses since they help to protect the features that appeal to tourists – attractive and interesting landscapes, wildlife, culture and local traditions. They ensure that these features continue to generate economic benefits for both business and local communities.

Sustainable tourism, as adopted by the tourism sector, and “wise use” as the fundamental approach for wetland management and conservation share the common aim of maintaining ecological processes, as well as other common goals. They provide a firm foundation on which to manage tourism in wetlands. Above all, wise use and sustainable tourism are about practical action by wetland managers and tourism businesses.

Many types of tourism take place in and around wetlands. These can include mass tourism,

marine and freshwater recreation, adventure and cultural tourism, hiking, and nature-based tourism, including ‘ecotourism’.

2.1 DEFINITIONS AND LINKAGES

Wise use of wetlands is the central principle of the Ramsar Convention. Is sustainable tourism consistent with this?

The definition of sustainable tourism adopted by the UNWTO specifically states that sustainable tourism should “make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.” Thus sustainable tourism as defined by UNWTO is indeed consistent with Ramsar’s wise use principle.

There are additional elements in UNWTO’s definition that are consistent with Ramsar Resolutions and guidelines, including the recognition of cultural values and traditional knowledge and the desirability of creating opportunities to sustain and improve peoples’ livelihoods, especially for the poor.

CONSERVATION AND WISE USE UNDER THE CONVENTION

The Mission of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is “the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”.

In its simplest terms, wise use of wetlands under the Convention means the maintenance of their ecological character, including the ecosystem processes and services.

A full definition of wise use is available in Volume 1 of the Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2010)



*Canoeing - the greatest spring
adventure in Soomaa, Estonia*
©Mati Kose

UNWTO'S DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM:

Expressed simply, **sustainable tourism** can be defined as:

“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”.

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established among these three dimensions to guarantee long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

- 1.** *Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.*
- 2.** *Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.*
- 3.** *Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.*

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience for tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting relevant sustainable practices.

Source: UNEP and UNWTO, 2005.



*Local homestay at village Kozok, India
©Pankaj Chandan / WWF-India*



2.2 AN APPROACH TO ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism means putting principles of sustainable development into practice in tourism. It applies to all those involved in this activity – not just businesses, but also at the destinations where tourism takes place, local and national government, and, of course, tourists themselves.

A useful approach is already well documented by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (see box).

UNEP & UNWTO - AN AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, FROM MAKING TOURISM MORE SUSTAINABLE: A GUIDE FOR POLICY MAKERS

This publication provides practical guidance on sustainable tourism to policy makers. It includes a summary of the priority issues for an agenda for sustainable tourism in relation to the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism. This provides a framework to assist the development of policies for more sustainable tourism based on:

- minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on society and the environment; and
- maximizing tourism's positive and creative contribution to local economies, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the quality of life of hosts and visitors.

The twelve aims for an agenda for sustainable tourism are:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Economic viability | 5) Visitor fulfillment | 9) Physical integrity |
| 2) Local prosperity | 6) Local control | 10) Biological diversity |
| 3) Employment quality | 7) Community well-being | 11) Resource efficiency |
| 4) Social equity | 8) Cultural richness | 12) Environmental purity |

The order in which these twelve aims are listed does not imply any order of priority: each is equally important.

Source: UNEP & UNWTO, 2005.





Sunset in the Okavango Delta, Botswana
© Alicia Wirz



The Green Fee Initiative in Palau

The Green Fee is part of the 35 USD departure tax for non-Palauan passport holders to pay when leaving. Of this amount, 15 USD is paid into a national account managed by the Protected Area Network Fund. Community conservation groups can submit project applications to the Fund. Tourists holidaying in Palau since November 2009 have helped to raise over one million dollars for the country's protected areas.

Source: SPREP, 2012

3. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF TOURISM IN WETLANDS

3.1 OPPORTUNITIES

Tourism creates a range of opportunities, and not just through the provision of jobs and other economic benefits. When it is well-planned and effectively managed, it can also increase awareness of and support for conservation of the key resources on which tourism depends and presents an opportunity to create and strengthen community participation in wetland management.

The economic benefits generated by tourism can include gains that accrue regionally from tourist expenditure (for example, on accommodation, food, transport, guides); employment generated both at a wetland site and more generally within local communities; and direct income for protected areas raised, for example, from entrance fees.

Detailed economic studies on the benefits generated by wetland tourism are not always available. Where these studies have been conducted, however, they show that tourism can have major economic benefits for wetlands. In the Everglades, in the United States, this amounts to around USD 450 million in direct and indirect expenditures by tourists and from employment in the tourism sector. Furthermore, sites such as the Everglades are often used as icons in regional tourism marketing, and may help attract many more regional visitors in addition to those that take trips into the park itself. Tourism incomes thus can support the wise use of wetlands, which in turn sustains tourism activities.



Flamingoes in Lake Nakuru, Kenya
©Amos Rono, KWS

The Voluntary Conservation Levy (VCL) in Malaysian Borneo

Initiated by WWF through the Corridor for Life Project, the VCL initiative brings together local tourism operators committed to protecting the environment their businesses depend on. Visitors are encouraged to give a voluntary contribution of MYR 20 (~5 USD) per person that is donated to the Kinabatangan Corridor of Life Tourism Operators Association (KiTA) for conservation projects in the Kinabatangan river in Borneo.

Source: WWF, 2011.

3.1.1 Revenues for conservation

A protected area does not necessarily need to charge an entrance fee to be economically successful as a resource for tourism. The main requirement is to ensure that sufficient funds are reinvested into wetland management so that the area remains a valued tourist destination. For example, Soomaa National Park in Estonia does not charge an entrance fee, but has an active programme of working with local businesses to develop their ability to create local jobs and income from tourists visiting the park. This has wider economic benefits and justifies continued national funding for Park conservation.

Many wetlands and protected areas with significant levels of tourism do charge entrance fees,

however. Lake Nakuru –one of Kenya’s ‘Premium Parks’ and an icon for the country’s tourism – charges foreign visitors an entrance fee of USD 80.00. This generates significant revenues for the Kenya Wildlife Service which manages this and other National Parks. Overall around 70% of Kenya’s international tourism is based around the country’s wildlife, so the mutual importance of biodiversity conservation and tourism is clear.

Thus the income generated from tourism can contribute to the costs of managing its impacts on the environment. This creates benefits for both conservation and local economies. In some sites, such as Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in the Philippines, the role of the management

authority goes beyond protected area management to include assisting with the economic development and environmental management of surrounding areas. This may not increase income directly to the management authority, but it is important in building support for wetland protection and ensuring that facilities are suitably planned and developed.

3.1.2 Livelihoods and poverty alleviation

Globally, tourism is the primary source of foreign earnings for the world's 49 least developed countries, and it generates 45% of the total exports in services of developing countries (UNWTO, 2008). It is a principal export of services in over 80% of developing countries and the main export of one third of them. In some developing countries, notably small island states, tourism can account for over 25% of GDP.

Practical benefits to the poor through tourism can come from the effective channeling of visitor spending and associated investments at local scales. However, it is clear that at present this does not always happen, and the particular relationship between wetlands, sustainable tourism and poverty reduction is complex and worthy of further investigation to increase the contribution of tourism development to poverty alleviation (van der Duim & Henkens, 2007; UNWTO 2010a).

Because tourism is so significant for the economies of many developing countries, it raises two important questions:

- *How well does it contribute to wider development objectives?*
- *Is tourism as effective as it could be?*

In considering tourism as a tool for alleviating poverty, the UNWTO has identified seven mechanisms through which the poor can benefit from tourism:

1. *Employment of the poor in tourism enterprises*
2. *Supply of goods and services to tourism enterprises by the poor or by enterprises*
3. *Direct sales of goods and services to visitors by the poor (informal economy)*
4. *Establishment and running of small, micro or community-based tourism enterprises or joint ventures by the poor (formal economy)*
5. *Redistribution of proceeds from taxes or charges on tourists or tourism enterprises*
6. *Voluntary giving and support by tourists and tourism enterprises*
7. *Investment in infrastructure stimulated by tourism also benefitting the poor in the locality, directly or through support to other sectors.*

Source: UNWTO, 2004.

As examples of the practical application of these mechanisms, at Tubbataha Reefs National Park (Philippines), 10% percent of the conservation fee

that tourists pay to enter is used to fund livelihood initiatives in communities in the region. Similarly, in the Parc Nacional das Quirimbas (Mozambique), 20% percent of entrance fees are allocated to support community activities (Republic of Mozambique, Ministry of Tourism, 2009).

In the Ibera Marshes in Argentina, the development of attractive conservation-based tourism activities has revived the economy of Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, near the Ramsar Site "Lagunas y Esteros del Iberá". This has created new jobs and alternative livelihood opportunities so that the local inhabitants stay employed in the town rather than migrating to cities to look for work. Around 90% of the population is now supported through work in the tourism sector.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

Development objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are not limited to economic performance. The eight MDGs set worldwide objectives for reducing extreme poverty and hunger, improving health and education, empowering women and ensuring environmental sustainability by 2015. The 2011 MDG Report highlighted major successes in reducing extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease, but despite this, it also found that the most vulnerable are being left behind.



*African elephant near Etosha
Pans Ramsar Site, Namibia
© Sandra Hails*

Tourism in Namibia

Namibia has calculated that in 2007 tourism contributed 14.2% of GDP (including direct and indirect contributions), and nature-based tourism activities are the leading reason for visitors to come to the country. Of Namibia's six parks, the Etosha Pans Ramsar Site attracts around 200,000 visitors per year, by far the highest number of all their Parks.

Ministry of Environment and Tourism, 2007

3.1.3 Support to local, regional and national economies

With at least half of all tourism taking place in coastal areas, the quality of wetland ecosystems is a vital economic resource for many tourism destinations – for example, through the maintenance of unpolluted beaches and bathing waters. Coastal-based tourism is vital for the economies of Caribbean states and territories and many other parts of the Americas, for southern Florida, Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula, Mediterranean coastal areas, in India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific islands.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report on wetlands in 2005 estimated that recreational fishing generates considerable income: 35-45 million people take part in recreational fishing (inland

and saltwater) in the United States alone, spending a total of USD 24-37 billion each year on their hobby. Much of the economic value of coral reefs – with net benefits estimated at nearly USD 30 billion each year – is generated from nature-based tourism, including scuba diving and snorkeling.

3.1.4 Awareness raising

Those managing protected areas have an important role to play in building the awareness of local residents, tourists and tourism businesses of the value of the natural resources on which tourism and the local livelihoods depend. Such awareness-raising is generally an integral part of the tourism offered by guided tours, visitor centres and educational programmes. Tourists generally

show a strong desire to understand the places they are visiting. In wetlands this means viewing wildlife and habitats; learning about wetland ecology and conservation as well as experiencing the local culture; or just simply enjoying being within a beautiful natural environment.

A successful example is in the Humedal La Conejera in Colombia, where the active programmes of work with schools, as well as establishment of interpretive trails, have stimulated city-wide understanding of the importance of wetlands for Bogota’s water supplies and environmental quality. At Nakuru in Kenya there is a large scale environmental education programme that reaches around 100,000 school students each year, as well as low-cost wildlife viewing tours that the National Park runs for residents.



*Kayaking tours run by local trained guides are
one of the most popular tourist activities in
Palau ©Monica Zavagli*

3.2 CHALLENGES

Tourism development in and around wetlands may result in environmental as well as social pressures to the local area and its communities. The broad range of such pressures has been identified in the *Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism* developed by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Impacts of tourism in relation to the environment and biological diversity may include:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) <i>Use of land and resources for accommodation, tourism facilities and other infrastructure provision, including road networks, airports and seaports</i>b) <i>Extraction and use of building materials (e.g., use of sand from beaches, reef limestone and wood)</i>c) <i>Damage to or destruction of ecosystems and habitats, including deforestation, draining of wetlands, and intensified or unsustainable use of land</i>d) <i>Increased risk of erosion</i>e) <i>Disturbance of wild species, disrupting normal behaviour and potentially affecting mortality and reproductive success</i>f) <i>Alterations to habitats and ecosystems</i>g) <i>Increased risk of fires</i>h) <i>Unsustainable consumption of flora and fauna by tourists (e.g., picking plants; purchase of souvenirs manufactured from wildlife, in particular such endangered species as corals and turtle shells; unregulated hunting, shooting and fishing)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) <i>Increased risk of introduction of alien species</i>j) <i>Intensive water demand from tourism</i>k) <i>Extraction of groundwater</i>l) <i>Deterioration in water quality (freshwater, coastal waters) and sewage pollution</i>m) <i>Eutrophication of aquatic habitats</i>n) <i>Introduction of pathogens</i>o) <i>Generation, handling and disposal of sewage and waste-water</i>p) <i>Chemical wastes, toxic substances and pollutants</i>q) <i>Solid waste (garbage or rubbish)</i>r) <i>Contamination of land, freshwater and seawater resources</i>s) <i>Pollution and production of greenhouse gases, resulting from travel by air, road, rail, or sea, at local, national and global levels</i>t) <i>Noise</i> |
|---|---|

Socio-economic and cultural impacts related to tourism may include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) <i>Influx of people and social degradation (e.g., local prostitution, drug abuse, etc.)</i>b) <i>Impacts on children and youth</i>c) <i>Vulnerability to the changes in the flow of tourist arrivals which may result in sudden loss of income and jobs in times of downturn</i>d) <i>Impacts on indigenous and local communities and cultural values</i>e) <i>Impacts on health and the integrity of local cultural systems</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">f) <i>Intergenerational conflicts and changed gender relationships</i>g) <i>Erosion of traditional practices and lifestyles</i>h) <i>Loss of access by indigenous and local communities to their land and resources as well as sacred sites, which are integral to the maintenance of traditional knowledge systems and traditional lifestyles</i> |
|---|--|

Source: Convention on Biological Diversity, 2004.



Danube Delta tourist resort, controlling tourism infrastructure can be a major challenge in wetland areas
©Peter Lengyel

3.2.1 Environmental challenges

Inappropriate development in and around wetlands may affect the ecological character of wetlands and the wetland ecosystem services they can deliver, including tourism. The converse is also true: poorly managed tourism development in and around a wetland may have negative impacts on the ecological character of the wetland.

While tourism has many potential benefits for conservation, it can also have negative impacts on wildlife and habitats. Development of tourism infrastructure within the wetland or immediately around it, such as hotels, restaurants, and parking areas, may directly affect the health of a wetland ecosystem, and so too may the uncontrolled presence of people in fragile habitats which may cause disturbance or damage to wildlife. Some common examples of disturbance are damage to coral reefs from scuba diving and disturbances to animals that affect their feeding and breeding success. For example, in Ba Be National Park, Vietnam, wastes and noise from tourism are adversely affecting birds and small mammals around the lake shore, and management solutions are now being implemented to resolve those issues. In the UK's Peak District, the large number of people who hike across blanket bogs has served to destroy the surface vegetation and led to extensive erosion of the peat below; efforts are now underway to restore some of the worst damage, and to manage hiking activities to avoid further damage.

River basins and their associated wetlands can be severely affected by many types of development. Land use intensification can reduce water flows within basins by diversions to settlements or irrigation schemes resulting in reduced flows to wetlands. In addition, land-based activities can be a source of pollution for wetlands, leading to inflows of heavy metals or other toxic materials or

to nutrient enrichment, for example, from sewage and fertiliser run-offs. It is therefore vital to ensure that water flows and water quality are sufficient to maintain the wetland's ecological character. This not only benefits conservation interests but also maintains the wetland's attractiveness for tourists. Sewage and industrial effluents from Nakuru Town, Kenya's fourth largest town, and agrochemicals from intensified farming within the catchment continue to pollute Lake Nakuru, a globally recognized tourist destination, and this remains a long-term challenge for lake management and sustained tourism.

Increasing populations can be a further source of pressure for development in and around wetlands. As population density increases, pressure may come from more people wishing to access the site for recreation or other purposes. As tourist developments come closer to wetland sites, there are likely to be demands from local tourism businesses to increase tourism activities within the site. At a coral reef, for example, these may include pressures to increase permitted numbers of divers; to open new dive sites; to provide more visitor facilities; or to allow more tourism businesses to operate in the site. Over time, such pressures may eventually lead to the degradation of the wetland's ecological character, but the agreement and enforcement of site management and tourism plans can provide a means of successful mitigation.

It is always important that regional planning for tourism and other forms of development take into account the potential impacts that such developments within a catchment can have on wetlands nearby and further downstream as well, and to consider sensible limits on the type, scale and intensity of tourism that can be supported while remaining sustainable.

TOURISM AND ITS FOOTPRINT

As well as being affected by climate change through impacts on environmental conditions at destinations, the tourism sector is also a contributor to climate change. It is estimated that overall the sector accounts for 4.9% of global CO₂ emissions (range 3.9% - 6.0%), most of this coming from the tourism components of air transport (40%), other forms of transport (35%) and accommodation (21%) and these projections are bound to grow in the coming decades (UNWTO & UNEP 2008).

Governments, the tourism sector, and tourists themselves all have a role to play in reducing the climate change footprint of tourism.

Governments can play an important role in promoting changes towards reduction of carbon emissions. One of the most efficient ways of initiating change will be through raising the costs of energy and emissions through taxes or tradable permits; subsidies can also help trigger positive shifts in consumption toward low-carbon holiday experiences, for example by rewarding low-carbon consumers. Efforts must also be made by tourism businesses to improve their energy and water efficiency, to invest in renewable energy technology, and to comply with quality standards and environmental practices throughout the entire value chain (WWF 2008; OECD & UNEP 2011).

As tourists, each of us can also contribute to minimizing our tourist footprint by planning our travels with care. This can be done in various ways, for example, by choosing a holiday to a nearer destination instead of flying to the other side of the world; using public transport wherever possible at your destination; selecting tour operators and hotels that present themselves as 'environmentally aware' (WWF 2008).

3.2.2 Socio-economic challenges

Tourism activities can bring socio-economic as well as cultural challenges with the potential to negatively affect the well-being and traditions of the local people. They can also create conflicts with local communities, particularly when they limits people's access to the resources important for their livelihoods, such as water, fodder, fish, etc.

Conservation can also result in conflicts with the local people where activities prevent or reduce the ability of communities to access resources they have previously used, or where protected wildlife damages crops or threatens community safety. Managing these challenges can be extremely difficult, as the losses experienced by communities may not be sufficiently or equitably compensated by the employment or income that tourism can provide.

Conflicts with socio-economic consequences can also arise over allocation of water resources between the needs of local communities and their agriculture and the need to maintain a wetland's ecological character. For example, between 1992 and 2002 two droughts combined with large volumes of irrigation water abstracted from rivers supplying Lake Ichkeul in Tunisia led to major declines in the lake's ecosystem. This had the consequence of reducing the lake's attraction for tourists as well as leading to a 75% decline in populations of waterbirds there. Implementation of active water management practices, along with commitments to ensure that Lake Ichkeul receives sufficient freshwater inflows to sustain its ecological value and productivity, has now reversed this damage, and the levels of tourism have doubled since 2005.

3.2.3 The costs of managing tourism

Successful tourism requires investment in facilities and staff to manage the visitors and to provide information and services for them. Within wetlands, facilities and services can either be provided directly by wetland management organizations, often part of the public sector but sometimes part of the private or voluntary sectors instead, or by tourism businesses themselves. However these facilities and services are provided, they are a necessary part of each site's "tourism offer". Such investments can of course be financially very challenging.



Birdwatching, an important 'specialist' tourist activity in wetlands; birders in the Danube Delta
©Peter Lengyel

4. MANAGING TOURISM IN AND AROUND WETLANDS

Tourism, like any commercial activity, must be managed as a business if it is to be successful, whether it is run by private, public or voluntary sector organizations. Managing tourism as a business does not mean that tourism should take precedence over the environmental or social objectives for the wetlands. However, if tourism cannot be developed to be commercially viable within the limits set by a site's environmental and social objectives, it is a good indication that tourism would be inappropriate for that site.

It has been forecasted that, in coming years, more people will be travelling to more places – many of them wetlands. This might well lead to more impacts on the global environment from the tourism sector, with increases in greenhouse gas emissions, in waste generation, in resource use, and in the areas of land used for tourism.

The tourism chapter of the UN's Green Economy Report, prepared jointly by UNEP and UNWTO, suggests that green investment scenarios could accommodate forecasted tourism growth while reducing the intensity (amount per tourist-day) of energy use, water consumption, polluting emissions, and waste generation in the tourism sector. However, even with such reductions, the absolute levels of consumption and water use by the sector would still grow, as would the land converted to tourism uses from other uses (UNEP, 2011).

Accordingly, the challenge for wetland managers is to be prepared:

- *to manage all types of tourism that may affect wetland sites, whether directly or indirectly;*
- *to maximize the benefits that tourism may be able to contribute to wise use and wetland conservation;*

- *to minimize adverse environmental effects; and*
- *to direct tourism away from the most fragile and sensitive sites.*

In cases where tourism provides few real benefits for a site, minimizing threats and adverse effects from tourism still makes a contribution to site protection and keeps open future possibilities of benefits and site restoration. But there are also cases where tourism is simply not compatible with conservation and wise use objectives, and it should be prohibited or controls imposed by zoning to define different uses and access to different parts of wetland sites, or by attracting tourists into areas that can accommodate their impacts with fewer adverse effects.

4.1 MAKING TOURISM SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE

Dialogue among different stakeholders is central to determining what a destination can offer sustainably, what its communities will accept, and what its businesses can offer in light of the market demand for tourism and visitor satisfaction.

Successful tourism destinations offer activities that visitors want to experience, that businesses can provide profitably, that residents are happy with and accept, and that the environment can support. Because tourism is a highly dynamic sector, destinations need to maintain good links to the market and provide distinctive tourism experiences that appeal to tourists. At the same time, destinations need to implement effective approaches to avoid adverse environmental impacts from tourism and to maximize its benefits for conservation and communities.

Tourism that visitors want

Tourism depends strongly on market demand. Tourists have access to an ever-growing number of destinations and tourism 'products', and the sector is highly competitive. Destinations need to make sure that they continue to attract tourists through marketing, design and development of high quality experiences, maintenance of standards, and innovation in the tourism products they offer. They need to build on the features that make them distinctive, focusing on those aspects of tourism they are best able to provide.

Tourism that businesses can provide profitably

Businesses need to be able to satisfy the market demand from tourists, and to do so profitably, so that they can generate employment and other economic benefits that remain within the area and its host communities. Achieving this requires businesses that play to their strengths,

by focusing on what they can best offer within the resources the destination can provide. These include the availability and quality of accommodation and catering, its transport links and basic infrastructure, local supplies of goods and services, as well as a destination's natural, historic and cultural resources.

Today, it is possible to find tourists in almost any part of the world, however remote. The key question for tourism businesses, and for anyone attempting to develop tourism for wetlands, is not whether some tourists will visit a particular site but whether sufficient numbers will come to make tourism there commercially and economically viable. A further challenge for local businesses working with international tourism is that tourists are looking for destinations that combine local distinctiveness with global standards and value-for-money. To be successful, these businesses and destinations must strike a balance and be able to offer tourists something special delivered with the efficiency and standards they are used to in their home countries.

Tourism that residents can accept and benefit from

Local communities and residents are the ultimate hosts of tourism. In popular destinations, the number of tourists can have significant effects on local communities, for example, making it more difficult for local people to access key livelihood resources, driving up prices and living costs, and crowding them out of the places where they live. At the same time, local communities, traditions



*Viewpoint of Velika dolina in
Skocjan Caves, Slovenia
©Borut Lozej,
Archive of the Park Skocjan Caves*

and opportunities for interactions with local people can be a very important part of the tourism experiences that attract visitors. If communities are happy to accept tourists, these experiences are likely to be positive.

Tourism that the environment can support

The natural, historic and cultural characteristics of any destination are key resources for tourism. The success of tourism depends on protecting and enhancing those resources, and avoiding any adverse impacts on them from tourism activities as well as from other sectors. This includes measures to control pollution and generation of wastes, including solid wastes and sewage, and to promote the sustainable use of energy and water and the conservation of biodiversity.

Getting the right balance

Successful tourism depends on getting the right balance between visitors, businesses, local communities, the destination, and what the environment can support. Achieving that balance involves dialogue among the stakeholders to determine what the destination can offer sustainably, what its communities will accept, and what its businesses can offer in relation to the market demand for tourism and visitor satisfaction. Out of this dialogue, destinations can create an overall vision and strategy for tourism, defining the numbers of tourists and types of tourism that are acceptable and sustainable within the destination, where and how those types of tourism can take place, and how tourism will be managed and developed.

4.2 ESTABLISHING CLEAR PLANS AND OBJECTIVES

4.2.1 Wetland management planning

Wetland management planning and plans are essential tools for resolving the multiple issues arising from activities in wetlands, including tourism.

Meaningful involvement of local communities in decision-making is a central element of both wetland wise use and successful tourism.

Wetland management plans and their implementation are essential for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and are designed to ensure that wetlands maintain their ecological character and continue to provide key ecosystem services. Management plans provide the starting point and framework for the management of tourism and recreation in balance with other ecosystem services and conservation objectives.

The Škocjan Caves in Slovenia provide an example of catchment management that is designed to protect the core site, an area of around 400 hectares, from activities within the wider catchment. Under the Škocjan Caves Regional Park Act, the catchment has been designated as a buffer

zone and the Škocjan Caves Park Public Service Agency has been given a statutory role for protection, management and supervision of the protected area, alongside municipal authorities, in planning and management within the entire catchment, including for its settlements, agriculture and forestry. All activities in the buffer zone that are likely to alter the water regime and the water quality of the Reka River are prohibited, with the exception of flood protection measures.

Wetland management, and indeed any environmental management, benefits from full stakeholder participation at both the planning and implementation stages. While it is recognized that this requires time and funding, the resulting

support for, and assistance with, implementation usually justifies the investment. The level of participation and the diversity of stakeholders involved can be very variable.

Local communities are key stakeholders in wetland management and in any tourism that is linked with wetlands. In many cases, wetlands have been – and remain – central to the livelihoods of communities living in and around them, and wetland landscapes have been shaped and protected by those communities. The involvement of communities in planning and decision-making – including on tourism development and management – is an essential part of successful conservation and wise use at wetland sites.

MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Danube Delta (Romania)

A strategy for international conservation assistance was established in 1991, with support from IUCN, to create an integrated plan for management and restoration of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR). This provided guidelines for forestry, agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, and for immediate practical conservation by individual agencies. The first Management Plan was produced in 1994-1995 with inputs from government agencies, academic institutions, and scientific institutes, including the Danube Delta Research Institute (DDNI), the Tourism Research Institute, and others. Ecological restoration of the delta began to succeed in the mid-1990s, and by 2012, more than 15,000 hectares of abandoned polders have been ecologically restored to wetlands in good condition, with support from the World Bank Project 'Danube Delta Biodiversity' and the government. During 2001-2002 the Management Plan was revised, and during 2006-2007 a second Management Plan was elaborated with the support of the members of Scientific Council of DDBRA.

Humedal La Conejera (Colombia)

The wetland has an Environmental Management Plan with ecological zoning establishing areas for strict conservation, for ecological restoration, and for environmental education and passive recreation that have trails for public access. Access is controlled and directed by eco-guide environmental educators. The main use of the wetland is biodiversity conservation, defined in the Land Use Plan of the city.



*Aboriginal rangers use an airboat to look for outbreaks of weeds on the Magela floodplains, Kakadu National Park, Australia
©David Hancock, Skyscans*

PROMOTING STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN WETLAND MANAGEMENT

Stakeholder involvement in wetland management can operate in various ways.

In the Everglades (USA) the Park is required under US federal legislation to prepare and consult communities and the public on a management plan for the entire site every five years, and also to conduct public consultations on implementation of major projects within that plan.

In Kakadu (Australia), representatives of the Aboriginal groups that are the traditional owners and caretakers of the land where the Park is located comprise two-thirds of the members of the Park's Board of Management.

In the Danube Delta (Romania) and many other wetland sites, governance involves a mix of public consultations, community representation on management boards, and participation or liaison with local municipalities so that local governance is also integrated with wetland governance.

>> See Ramsar Handbook 18: Managing wetlands | Ramsar Handbook 7: Participatory skills | Ramsar handbook 6: Wetland CEPA

4.2.2 Integrating tourism management into wetland conservation

Development plans for tourism should be integrated with management plans for biodiversity conservation and compatible with objectives for conservation and wise use of each site.

Just as clear management plans are necessary for the effective conservation and wise use of wetland sites, clear plans and objectives are also necessary for effective management and development of tourism. Such tourism plans should be integrated with site conservation plans. They need to define:

- *the purpose of tourism at the site,*
- *what types and scale of tourism are acceptable, and*
- *where and how it should take place within the site.*

The types of tourism could range from mass tourism to specialist wildlife watching, or could cover several types of tourism that are compatible with one another. The benefits of tourism could include supporting local economic development, establishing tourism businesses, raising awareness of the importance of the site, generating revenues to support conservation, or finding ways to improve the management of existing tourism to reduce adverse effects on the wetland.

Like the development of conservation plans, development of tourism plans should involve consultation and active participation of local communities, tourism businesses and destination authorities. Development of coordinated plans for conservation and tourism provide an opportunity to build cooperation among these stakeholders, and their input is necessary to determine what types of tourism are acceptable and

commercially feasible at any site. The more the various stakeholders are involved in the development of tourism plans, the more likely they will be to contribute to their successful implementation. This can include anything from complying with regulations and limits agreed in the plan, to developing new tourism experiences or making investments to improve tourism facilities and quality of service.

Tourism development and management may either be dealt with as part of the site management plans or in separate tourism plans that link to site management plans. Examples are:

- *Lake Ichkeul (Tunisia), where funding was obtained through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to prepare and begin to implement a Development and Management Plan and a Community Development Plan for the Park.*
- *Ibera Marshes (Argentina), where a management plan was prepared in 2005 by a team of around 55 specialists covering a broad range of conservation and management expertise and representing organizations involved in conservation of the marshlands.*
- *The Everglades (USA), where federal laws require the park's General Management Plan to be updated every five years; a public consultation on the next redraft is scheduled for 2013.*

GUIDELINES AND PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR MANAGING TOURISM IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has adopted *Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development*, which cover policy making, development planning, and management of tourism in destinations or sites. The guidelines also address education, capacity-building and awareness-raising, and their implementation is backed-up by a Users' Manual that provides checklists and practical guidance (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2004 and 2007).

The Europarc Federation in partnership with the European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism have published a 'how-to' practical manual, *Practical, profitable, protected: A starter guide to developing tourism in protected areas*, which provides case study-based guidance for those responsible for the management of protected areas as tourist destinations. (Europarc Federation and ECEAT, 2012).

Many other relevant materials are available and a number of those are identified in section 7.



A view of the Ibera Marshes
©Beccaceci

COMBINING TOURISM MANAGEMENT WITH CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Abroholos (Brazil)

Overall management of the Park takes place within the park's Management Plan, first established in 1991 and revised in 1995. A Public Use Plan was approved in 2003; it defines the guidelines for visitors, including diving and whale and bird observation activities, and is now part of the Management Plan. Most of the Park is designated as a total protection zone where no human activities or alterations are permitted. This zone includes nesting areas and the majority of the coral reefs. Other areas are designated for scientific research and environmental education. Tourism and recreation activities are confined to designated dive sites and a 1.6 km nature trail on the island of Siriba.

To protect the Park from excessive impacts from tourism, its regulations set a limit of 15 medium-sized vessels entering the Park waters each day, each with a maximum capacity of 15 passengers. This limit – representing a maximum of 225 visitors per day – is based on a carrying capacity assessment of the Park with the dual purposes of protecting its environment and fragile habitats and ensuring a high quality experience for visitors, preserving a sense of the remoteness and uniqueness of the Park and its dive sites. Only vessels that are accredited by the Park authorities are permitted in the Park. Each vessel is required to meet specifications set by the Brazilian Navy for safety and other operating equipment, and to have waste collection and storage tanks large enough to collect all wastes produced by passengers and crew.

All tourist groups must be accompanied by trained guides who have successfully completed an ecotourism training course run by the Bahia State's tourism organization or by ICMBio, the Chico Mendes Institute of Biodiversity Conservation.

WETLANDS – A RESOURCE FOR TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT

Lake Nakuru (Kenya)

Lake Nakuru National Park receives around 245,000 visitors each year – including 149,500 international tourists and 95,500 domestic visitors. As a 'Premium Park', international tourists are charged an entrance fee of USD 80, while domestic visitors pay 1,000 Kenyan shillings (USD 11). Entrance fees and concession fees from the lodges generated revenues of nearly 800 million Kenyan shillings in 2010, which helped to pay for the costs of park management. There are two privately run lodges in the Park, providing a total of 240 beds. The lodges are leased as concessions from the Kenya Wildlife Service which runs the Park, and they provide revenues of around 17 million Kenyan shillings for the Park each year.

The main tourism activities offered in Lake Nakuru National Park are game drives and bird watching, accessed via a network of all-weather roads and tracks that are maintained within the Park. These take tourists to see more than 50 mammal species and over 450 species of birds, including 70 species of waterbirds. The Park's impressive populations of mammals have been built up by careful management for over 50 years since it was first declared a National Park in 1961. This includes introduction of giraffe, black and white rhino from elsewhere in Kenya, and lions and leopards from South Africa. The Park now hosts many large mammals including other large herbivores, such as waterbuck, bushbuck and reedbuck.

4.3 MINIMIZING IMPACTS FROM TOURISM IN AND AROUND WETLANDS

Negative impacts from existing and future tourism activities can be minimized by appropriate management planning and monitoring.

The development of tourism facilities and infrastructure provision will likely create the potential for impacts on the surrounding environment. Such effects can be avoided or minimized by appropriate management planning approaches. These are much more difficult to implement, however, where negative impacts are already occurring on a significant scale, compared to applying methods to avoid damage in the first place.

In Abrolhos (Brazil) and Tubbataha (Philippines), strict controls on the numbers of tourists permitted in the Parks, as well as regulations controlling scuba diving, are used to protect the reefs from damage.

In Soomaa (Estonia), research has shown that if tourists were 500 metres or more away from nesting birds, there would be minimal disturbance. This information has been used to plan the routes of trails and boardwalks within the Park, with some areas closed to tourism during the nesting season.

In Tsomoriri (India) the peak tourism period also coincides with the peak breeding period for the lake's avifauna. The promotion of homestays, as alternative accommodation options for tourists, is now helping to reduce the pressures from unregulated camping near key breeding areas of endangered birds. Many tour operators are also regularly helping with garbage cleaning initiatives.

In Ba Be (Vietnam), local lake users and those providing boat trips for tourists are being encouraged to use their traditional wooden boats in preference to motor boats with diesel engines, in order to avoid water pollution and to reduce the noise pollution that has begun to adversely affect aquatic and lake-side wildlife.



Local stakeholders participating in a training course to promote the establishment of homestays
©Pankaj Chandan / WWF-India

SITING AND DESIGN OF HOTELS AND RESORTS

Both the design and specific location of hotels and resorts can have significant environmental impacts on wetlands and other ecosystems. IUCN's publication *The siting and design of hotels and resorts* identifies the potential impact on ecosystems of land-clearing and modifications of the landscape during the construction of hotels and resorts, such as removal of vegetation, changes in water flows, destruction or alteration of breeding and feeding grounds of birds, fish and mammals, changes in siltation rates and nutrient flows, etc.

Apart from such direct impacts of construction, it is important to consider the sources of building materials such as timber and sand used in the construction process, the use of non-native plant species in hotel gardens which may require excessive water, fertilizer and pesticide input, and the possibility of introducing invasive species inadvertently, etc.

Using a case study approach, this publication takes those impacts into consideration in the development of five key principles to safeguard biodiversity that are relevant for all ecosystems:

1. Adopt an ecosystem-based approach in tourism development planning
2. Manage impacts on biodiversity from hotel development and attempt to achieve an overall positive contribution
3. Design with nature and adopt nature-based solutions
4. Respect, involve and support local communities
5. Build collaboration among stakeholders.

Source: IUCN, 2012.

4.4 ENSURING BENEFITS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESSES

Well-managed tourism development in and around wetlands ensures that benefits accrue to local communities and contribute to sustain local livelihoods.

One of the objectives of sustainable tourism in and around wetlands is to generate economic benefits for local communities; such benefits encourage support for wetland protection and in some cases can play a vital role in reversing economic decline.

Many communities have strong livelihood and cultural links to wetlands, which have helped to protect and influence their ecological character over millennia. For example, Kakadu National Park in Australia has been shaped and protected by the Aboriginal groups that are the Park's traditional owners and caretakers. The linkages that these groups have with the land goes back over 50,000 years.

Local communities also play an important part of the tourism experience, as well as providing accommodation, restaurants and other services. The communities around Lake Ichkeul (Tunisia)

and Ba Be Lake (Vietnam) and in the Danube Delta (Romania) offer home-stays to tourists, and their local traditions and festivals provide added attractions. In the Soomaa region (Estonia), the park authorities are running a programme to help local tourism businesses. Similar approaches – often called community co-management – are being successfully applied in Africa: one of the keys to their success is that by giving communities rights to their land, they are then able to lease concessions to experienced tour operators with the ability to develop and market tourism products internationally.

Community links can be built and managed in a variety of ways. These include consultations on specific issues, regular forums for local communities and other stakeholders to meet site managers, efforts by community liaison staff, provision of assistance to enable communities to benefit from tourism opportunities and to help resolve

conflicts, and representation of communities on boards that oversee wetland site management.

Where links with local communities are poor or non-existent, conflicts are more likely to arise. When communities are adversely affected by tourism, it undermines any incentive for them to support conservation of the site. As well as affecting conservation, poor community links can also create social tensions that diminish the quality of experiences for tourists, which in the medium- to long-term may lead to reductions in visitor numbers and thus the amount of income derived from tourism.

Working with local communities to enable them to establish businesses for tourism is therefore an important aspect of managing visitation in wetlands. The community benefits thus gained are a further incentive for the people to support local wetland conservation.

WHALE SHARK WATCHING IN THE NORTHERN YUCATAN, MEXICO: BENEFITS FOR FISHERS, MARINE LIFE AND TOURISTS

A seasonal whale shark population visits the northeast corner of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, and a tourism industry has developed over the past years involving local community members in accordance with corresponding environmental regulations. Co-management between all stakeholders has been sought from the start. The Dominos (as the whale sharks are called by the local fishers) come to these waters for five months of the year in one of the world's largest known congregations of whale sharks. From May to September, the plankton-rich waters serve as a feeding ground for an estimated 800–1,400 individuals.

In 2003, WWF México and the National Commission for Protected Areas began a project with the fishers of Yumbalam, a Ramsar Site, with the central idea of providing training for fishers who were beginning to take tourists to swim and watch whale sharks. The training and capacity building consisted of courses on small business development, tourism interpretation, first aid, motor and boat maintenance, and marketing.

The aim was twofold, first to support the fishers in developing an alternative economic activity, and second, to reduce the fishing activities during these months of the year, giving a much needed respite to the marine resources of the area. Furthermore, having a diverse income source gives the community more stability since fishers no longer have to depend upon only one activity. There is a maximum of 160 permits (the estimated carrying capacity), one for each boat (8 passengers) to take tourists to watch and swim with the Dominos at the Ramsar Site.

Source: Dr. Carlos Garcia-Saez, Coordinador para la Atención de Humedales y Areas Costero Marinas CONANP, México www.conanp.gob.mx.



BENEFITS TO COMMUNITIES FROM TOURISM

Tubbataha (Philippines)

Ten percent of the conservation fees paid by visitors to the Tubbataha Reefs is allocated to livelihood initiatives in Cagayancillo, including support for local efforts to generate revenues from tourism. The Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board provides technical and other assistance to help improve the capacity of Cagayancillo Municipality to manage marine resources and local marine reserves, including thorough planning, enforcement activities against illegal fishing, zoning of different activities including seaweed farming, fish cages, and fishing grounds. Improving marine productivity and fish catches helps to raise living standards for local people, and it can reduce fishing pressures on the park and other conservation sites. For example, experience in the Philippines has shown that the establishment of locally-managed marine reserves can significantly increase fish catch for local communities, often within only three years.

Ba Be (Vietnam)

Lake-related tourism around Ba Be offers substantial alternative employment opportunities to local people through the provision of boat rides, home-stay facilities, restaurants and guide services. It also helps to conserve and develop indigenous culture through art performances, traditional festivals, and handicraft production.

The economic benefits for local communities can be considerable: for example, the payment for a team for an art performance is VND 500,000-1,200,000 (USD 25-60), for a boat excursion VND 500,000 (USD 25)/boat/trip, and for a home stay, around VND70,000 (USD 4) per guest per night. There are 18 houses available for home stays. In 2011, the average revenue from home stays was VND40 million (USD 2,000)/household/year in Bo Lu and VND25 M(USD 1,250)/household/year in Pac Ngoi. There are also 83 households that provide boat transportation services in the lake, and each can earn as much as VND 800,000 (USD 40)/month.

Tourism and the income it generates is helping to raise awareness amongst tourism businesses, local communities and authorities of the value of conservation of the Ba Be National Park.

Lake Ichkeul (Tunisia)

Promoting the National Park and surrounding areas as a tourism destination has helped raise awareness about conservation and the importance of wetland wise use, and has generated new sources of income that have contributed to the maintenance of the Park's infrastructure, including its visitor centre, and to conservation management. The Park now has a programme of support, including basic training and credit schemes, to increase the involvement of local businesses and communities in tourism activities, in order to expand local employment and economic benefits from tourism. This has included establishing tourism businesses such as restaurants, accommodation, and souvenir shops selling local products and crafts, and employment opportunities as Park guides.

A CREATIVE PRODUCT TO ENHANCE THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE AND CONSERVATION

The development of 'bogshoe' walks at Soomaa National Park (Estonia) is a good example of the way in which wetland managers and tourism providers can work together to develop tourism activities that deliver great experiences while protecting wetlands. The Park provides a series of specially designed boardwalks that allow visitors access to the Park's bogs and forests without damaging them. However, tour operators found that this limited the types of tourism experience it was possible to offer visitors. The Park sought with local tour operators to develop an innovative tour that gives visitors wilderness experiences of the bogs, while protecting the site's fragile habitats and wildlife. This led to the development of guided 'bogshoe' walks using snowshoes so that visitors can walk over the spongy and fragile bog vegetation without damaging it. The Park and tour operators work closely together to ensure that 'bogshoe' walks are carefully controlled, with limits set on numbers allowed and monitoring to ensure that no damage is caused to the bogs and their wildlife. The 'bogshoe' walks allow visitors to leave the boardwalks and explore more remote areas of the Park – they have helped to diversify the types of tourism offered by the Park, and provide an almost unique experience that attracts visitors and helps promote the Park and its tourism, with benefits for local tour operators and other businesses.



*Bogshoeing in the Soomaa Ramsar Site:
a novel experience for many tourists*
© Alvar Ruukel

4.5 PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY TOURISM SERVICES AND EXPERIENCES FOR VISITORS

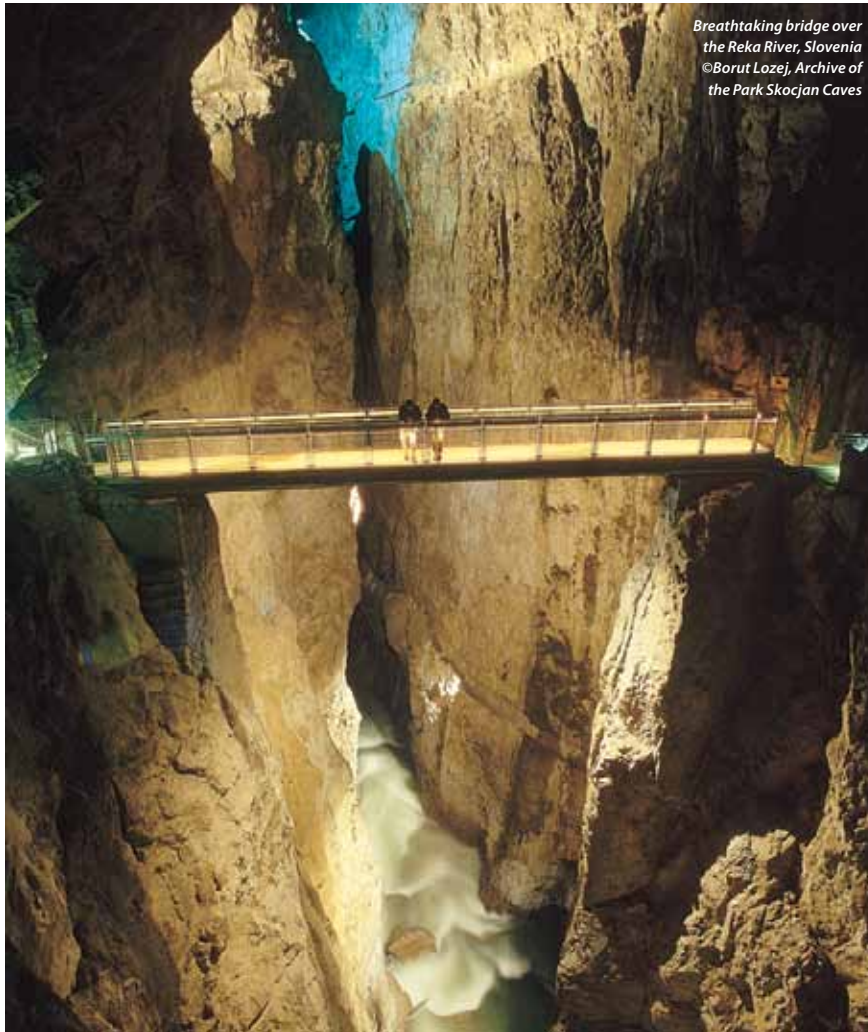
Offering enriching experiences at wetlands is important for attracting tourists but needs careful planning to ensure that visitation rates and activities are ecologically and socially sustainable.

Visitor experiences and 'product' development

Tourism is as much about experiences as it is about places. The combination of memorable experiences in great places strongly attracts visitors to particular destinations and makes tourism truly successful.

Places provide the setting for visitor experiences, but places on their own are rarely sufficient for successful tourism. Exciting, enriching

and unusual experiences can make wetlands distinctive and attractive for tourists. At a wetland site in or near a major destination, these experiences will often be provided by a combination of visitor centres and guided tours; at remote sites, unusual transport, accommodation and meals will also form part of the tourism experience.



*Breathtaking bridge over
the Reka River, Slovenia
©Borut Lozej, Archive of
the Park Skocjan Caves*

Around coral reefs such as Tubbataha in the Philippines, controls on sites where scuba diving is permitted, and the number of divers allowed, are used not just to protect the reefs but to maintain the quality of the diving experience as well. The Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board also aims to diversify tourism in the Park; possibilities exist to open the Park and

surrounding areas to other water sports, such as snorkeling, kayaking, kite boarding, or windsurfing. Importantly, the impacts of such activities on the fragile reef ecosystem and surface wildlife and habitats are being assessed and the need for new regulatory guidelines for such activities is being evaluated.

In the Skocjan Caves in Slovenia, the management authority has made a major investment to build a visitor centre and to construct walkways and viewpoints within the caves, so that visitors can experience them in safety and the caves are more able to withstand the pressure from the large numbers of visitors.

The lack of innovative tourism products and the lack of up-to-standard facilities often lead to a loss of attractiveness; this has been the case in Abrolhos (Brazil), where in recent years the low quality of vessels that provide tours on the islands, and a lack of innovation of the tourist products offered, have contributed to a decline in the numbers of tourists visiting the Park – from an average of 12,900 in the years 1998-2001 to just 3,500 in 2011. To improve standards and reverse the decline in tourist numbers, the Park is implementing a system that has been successful in other parts of Brazil, under which tour and boat operators will tender for concessions.

These examples show ways in which wetland managers can take steps to maintain standards and develop new visitor experiences and tourism products together with the tourism operators. Certification schemes can assist wetland authorities in implementing high standards in their management of sustainable tourism and in consolidating their interactions with the tourism sector, leading to a 'reliable' product and an improved visitor experience.

SUPPORTING BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN AND AROUND WETLANDS

Soomaa (Estonia)

Private entrepreneurs provide accommodation and restaurants, as well as most of the tourism activities available with the Soomaa National Park. These include:

- Canoeing – the greatest spring adventure in Soomaa;
- Nature trails in bogs;
- Bog walking with snowshoes;
- Bird, butterfly and plant watching; and
- Cultural history (traditional meadow management, traditional lifestyles or adaptations for living in wetland wilderness environments).

Soomaa National Park has benefited from its membership of the European-based PAN Parks Network which has provided guidance on developing sustainable tourism in the region, working with the private sector, and encouraging local businesses to become engaged in tourism to the Park so that they gain economic benefits.

The practical benefits that Soomaa National Park has gained from that membership have included encouraging more positive attitudes to conservation amongst local communities; providing a focus for cooperation among public authorities, tourism businesses and communities; creating more employment and business opportunities in tourism; and joint planning and coordination on tourism and economic development. There has also been an increase of awareness about the importance of old cultural traditions.

CERTIFICATION SCHEMES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS

A number of European initiatives encourage protected areas, including wetlands, to implement high standards in their management of sustainable tourism and interactions with the tourism sector. These schemes provide independent criteria and assessments of sustainable tourism, and can be used by wetland managers to provide targets and a framework for implementation of sustainable tourism at wetland sites. Although these initiatives focus on European sites, they provide a model that could be developed and applied elsewhere.

PAN Parks, working for the protection, greater understanding, and appreciation of Europe's wilderness areas has developed the PAN Parks Verification and Certification system. Verification is carried out by a team of independent experts, in accordance with PAN Parks Principles, Criteria & Indicators. The PAN Parks principles ensure high standards of management for both conservation and sustainable development. All Pan Parks are independently audited against these standards every two years. The benefits of becoming a PAN Park include use of the PAN Parks brand, marketing benefits, promotion through PAN Parks communications channels, enhanced cooperation with local businesses, and possible cooperation with international tour operators. More information: www.panparks.org/learn/partnerships-for-protected-areas/apply-for-verification.

EUROPARC's "Transboundary Parks - Following Nature's Design" initiative is a verification and certification system that is intended to promote and facilitate transboundary cooperation between European protected areas. There are three elements to the system: the Basic Standards Criteria for Transfrontier Cooperation, which protected areas strive to fulfill; an evaluation process carried out by external verifiers; and, at the end of the process if enough basic categories are fulfilled, a formal certification as a "EUROPARC Transboundary Area". More information: www.europarc.org/what-we-do/transboundary-parks.



Canoeing in Soomaa, Estonia
©Mati Kose



A booklet to guide tourists around 40 of New Zealand's finest wetlands

4.6 COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Communication and education about wetlands help to raise awareness about wetland values and wetland biodiversity, and win support from tourists and others for wetland conservation.

Communication, education and awareness are significant tools for managers of wetland tourism, critical for the marketing, branding and promotion of wetland locations for tourists and tour operators (discussed in chapter 5). At site level, effective communication and education about wetland ecosystems, their biodiversity and values for people, generate understanding and support from visitors who in return will help to conserve wetland sites and may even raise funds through voluntary

donations to support conservation projects.

Communication tools about sites can include leaflets, websites, local television and radio programmes delivering information about access to the site, seasonal onsite events or specific tourist activities, as well as more detailed ecological and management information. At wetlands, visitor centres, trails, and appropriate signage can present much information about the wetland to tourists as well as local visitors.

AWARENESS RAISING ABOUT WETLANDS

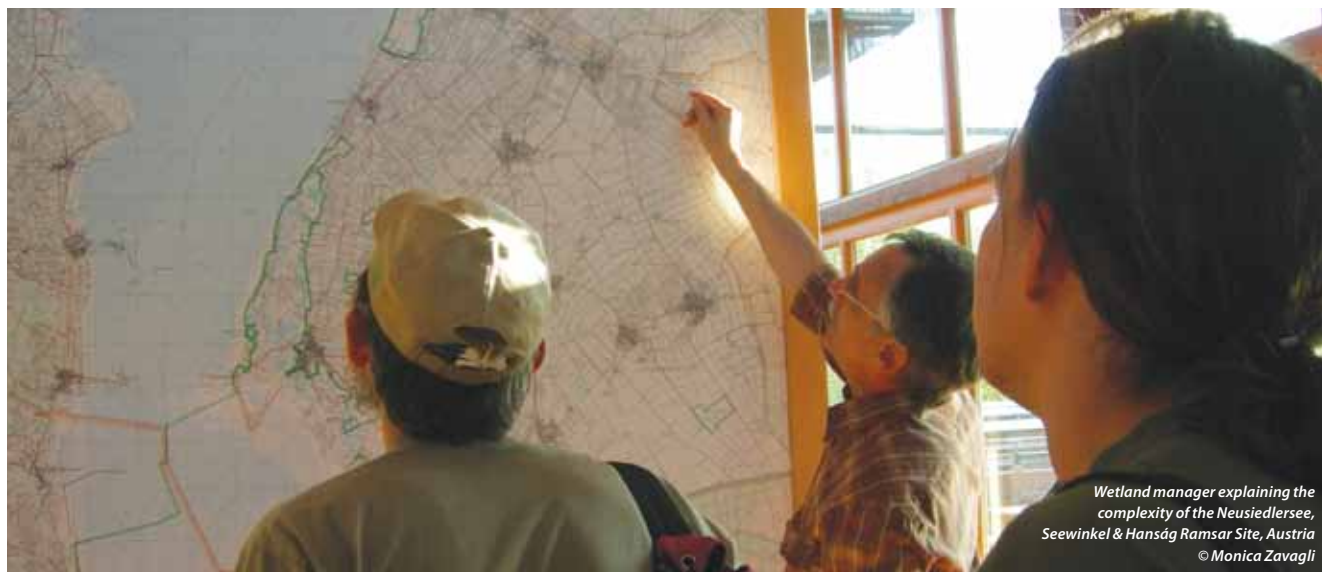
Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (Romania)

The Reserve Authority manages several visitor centres focused on raising awareness and educating visitors about the delta and its biodiversity. Perhaps of special note is their modern 3-D visitor centre promoting tourism in the Reserve and raising broad awareness about the delta. Built by the Tulcea County Council through a cross-border cooperation project financed by the European Union, the centre promotes the values of the natural heritage of the Danube Delta shared by Romania and Ukraine. The centre includes maps, information, and dioramas representing the natural habitats, landscapes and cultural heritage of the area as well as aquaria with the most important fish species, including the sturgeon, the biggest species in Danube Delta and one which is endangered.

Port Launay (Seychelles)

In June 2011, the Constance Ephelia Resort of Seychelles was awarded a grant of USD 40,000 from the government of Seychelles' "Mainstreaming Biodiversity" project funded by the Global Environment Facility. The grant supports a project initiated by Ephelia Resort and the NGO 'Sustainability for Seychelles' to enhance collaboration between the resort and community partners. The primary aim is to promote better conservation of the natural areas near the resort and the Ramsar-designated mangrove forest in Port Launay through raising awareness of resort staff, visitors, and the community about the importance of the environment and how they can help to protect it.

Under this project, the resort has produced an educational video for clients and staff, a brochure for clients highlighting all of the environmental features of the resort, tips for having an eco-friendly holiday, and interpretive signboards about the importance of various habitats in the area. The resort has also hosted a series of mangrove planting events involving the community and staff, focusing on regenerating degraded areas.



*Wetland manager explaining the complexity of the Neusiedlersee, Seewinkel & Hanság Ramsar Site, Austria
© Monica Zavagli*

Training staff and local communities to work with visitors

Particularly important for communicating effectively about the site and more broadly about wetlands are trained and knowledgeable guides. Leading and managing tourist groups in wetland sites requires a combination of tourism skills and conservation knowledge. When groups are well-led, they will help to protect the places they visit, and the risk that they may cause any damage is considerably reduced. The way groups are led and managed can also make a vital contribution to wetland awareness just by creating memorable and enriching experiences for visitors. To achieve this, staff and local communities need training and support on how to manage and interact with tour groups. They also need information and understanding about the site and its special features, and knowledge about appropriate tourist behaviour to help visitors get the most out of their visits and to minimize disturbance and damage.

Staff who interact well with tourists are a great added value for tourism, and they open up the potential to develop tourism products that build on the interactions they are able to have with tourists, who are often interested in understanding the lives and livelihoods of people in the places they visit. It is therefore important for wetland site managers to ensure that their staff and people in local communities, as well as local tourism businesses, are all able to provide accurate and up-to-date information to tourists and are trained in how to interact with tourists.

Some wetland site authorities manage and guide tours themselves and develop the skills needed to manage tour groups to go along with their conservation knowledge. At other sites managers work with tourism businesses to help their staff develop appropriate skills. The next chapter addressed the importance of interpretation and

guiding as important tools to enhance visitor experiences.

The case studies compiled for this report provide many further examples of different approaches to ensuring good interactions with tourists. For example, in the Ibera Marshes, the site management has provided training on working with and guiding tourists both for its rangers and for guides in local tourism businesses. In Kakadu, the Park authorities maintain a regular dialogue with tourism businesses to keep them up-to-date with what is happening in the Park. In Soomaa, the Park authorities work closely with local businesses who provide specialist activities to cater for the diverse interests of visitors, including canoeing, bird and butterfly watching, bog walking, and cultural history tours looking at traditional meadow management, old lifestyles and adaptations for living in a wetland wilderness environment.

>> See Ramsar Handbook 7: Participatory skills | Ramsar handbook 6: Wetland CEPA

5. WORKING WITH THE TOURISM SECTOR

Although international tourism is expected to increase rapidly, and domestic tourism may grow even faster, this growth will not be spread uniformly. Some destinations, such as the northern coasts of the Mediterranean, are already near the saturation point for tourism and should only see a limited expansion in the amount of tourism, while many newly emerging destinations will grow at a faster rate than the global average. However, the increase in visitors to these new destinations will depend on a range of factors. Even within countries where tourism is growing rapidly, only some locations will have a strong potential for development as tourism destinations.

A crucial feature of tourism is the rapidity with which demand can change, compared with other economic sectors. Expenditure on tourism is discretionary, and when money is tight, people tend to choose cheaper alternatives – perhaps traveling to destinations nearer to home and staying for shorter periods. For example, as a consequence of the present financial and economic downturn, there was a significant global drop in international tourism in 2009, though this has now been reversed.

Today's tourists have more choice of destinations, types of travel, and tourism activities than ever before. The Internet and its easy access to information make it convenient for tourists to compare tourism options around the world, and that makes the tourism industry a highly competitive

one. As a result, the demand to visit particular destinations or for particular types of tourism activities can vary significantly from year to year. Tourism professionals endeavor to anticipate how demand is likely to change over time, and to use a combination of marketing and tourism product development to maintain the competitiveness of any destination.

Collectively, the businesses that make up the tourism sector, in conjunction with changing market preferences amongst tourists, determine the level, types and economic value of tourism at any location. If a wetland site experiences, or actively engages in tourism, it will interact in some form with tourist businesses. It is important for wetland management authorities to understand the way the tourism sector works in order to help minimize adverse impacts from tourism and to maximize benefits obtained.

The most important question for tourism planning and development is not whether some tourists visit a site, but whether there is sufficient market demand to attract enough tourists to make tourism commercially viable. If a sufficient market is not there, then tourism is unlikely to be a viable option. This underlines the importance of rigorous market assessment and business planning when considering the tourism potential of any wetland site – including taking into account any other 'competing' wetlands in the area.



*Diving in Tubbataha Reef, Philippines
©Yvette Lee 2009*

5.1 THE TOURISM SECTOR

Working with the tourism sector at a wetland destination is the best way to ensure the right mix of resources and skills for tourism and conservation.

Tourism involves a range of resources and skills, and one person, community or organization is unlikely to possess all the requirements necessary to develop tourism successfully. Those skills and resources include management of the resources that attract tourists to a destination, provision of visitor facilities, businesses that offer appropriate accommodation and restaurant options, activities that offer enriching experiences, and tour operators and travel agents who can link the destination to tourism markets locally, nationally and globally.

Wetland managers and the tourism sector need to be able to work together:

- *to improve the management of existing tourism by minimizing adverse environmental and social impacts; and*
- *to develop tourism as part of the wise use of wetland sites.*

The following sections outline the way in which the tourism sector operates and highlight areas of common ground where collaboration between the tourism and the wetland sectors can be encouraged.

5.1.1 How the tourism sector operates

Understanding how the tourism sector works helps when planning for a development of tourism that is both commercially viable and compatible with wetland conservation.

The tourism sector includes all the businesses that help tourists to decide on the places they want to visit and to make their bookings, and that support them throughout their time away from home, including by providing transportation, accommodation, food, activities and excursions, and souvenirs. The sector also includes destination management organizations and national or regional tourism boards that help to support tourism businesses. These organizations and boards are often funded at least partly by subscriptions or taxes from tourism businesses and usually have roles in marketing, quality standards, and tourism product development. Finally, the sector includes tourism investors and developers who have a significant role in determining where and how fast tourism expands in a destination, as well as the type of tourism promoted at a destination.

A tour operator has an important role as a business that combines all the elements of tourism that a tourist requires into a single package, which it then markets and sells to its customers. The largest tour operators may own their own hotels and airlines, but most subcontract other businesses to supply accommodation and transport. Owning or subcontracting for accommodation and transport, and the other services that make up a holiday package, represents a considerable risk, since contracts have to be arranged well in advance of marketing and selling tour packages.

Tour operators therefore do all they can to minimize their commercial risks while keeping up with new market trends and destinations and maintaining their competitiveness.

Tour operators are particularly important in international tourism. Although the Internet now frequently makes it possible for tourists to book all elements of their holidays directly, a significant proportion of international tourists still prefer to book their holidays as a single package through a tour operator. This is often an easier way of booking, and it provides some guarantee of quality since tour operators have better knowledge of the facilities and activities at destinations or might specialize in providing particular types of tourism.

Of course some tourists – independent travellers – prefer to make their own arrangements and book directly with individual tourism businesses, generally via the Internet and using information available in guidebooks, on web pages, or in the media, or they may make their arrangements locally once they have arrived in the destinations they want to visit.

The market demand from tourists for visits to any wetland site depends on the extent to which tourists know about the site and the tourism experiences it can offer, the facilities such as accommodation and transport that are available in and

around the site, and its reputation for quality and value-for-money. In whatever way tourism takes place in wetlands – whether it is managed and operated directly by the wetland management authority or by private sector businesses that have access to the site either because they have operating concessions or because there are no controls on site access – it will be influenced by and will interact with the activities of the wider tourism sector.

If the wider tourism sector and local tourism businesses promote levels and types of tourism that are not compatible with wetland conservation objectives, and the site has no tourism controls in place, then the site is likely to experience adverse impacts from tourism. For example, a lack of controls and effective interaction between conservation management and tourism may lead to inappropriate siting of tourism facilities and activities that can damage some of the area's wildlife, and it may also have adverse effects on local inhabitants. But where the tourism sector and wetland sites work together, as in Soomaa and Kakadu, it is often possible to find ways to minimize any potentially adverse impacts and to plan for future development of tourism that is still commercially-viable but which is also compatible with the long-term conservation of wetlands as a resource for tourism.



5.1.2 Different interests but common ground

Effective interaction between tourism and wetland conservation occurs where the overlap between the mutual interest of each sector is identified through dialogue.

Effective interactions between wetland managers and tourism businesses can be hindered by the perception that their interests and approaches are significantly different. Tourism businesses may believe that wetland managers do not understand the value of tourism and may wish to prevent or limit tourism on their sites. Wetland managers may believe that tourism businesses have no concern for wetland conservation and would prefer to expand tourism and maximize their profits free from any controls. The reality is often different: many tourism businesses recognize the need to protect wetlands and the environment generally, because they are important assets for tourism, and thus they proactively adopt good practices; similarly, many wetland managers recognize that tourism is a good way of demonstrating the value of wetland conservation and sustainable use by generating local

employment and enabling tourists to experience wetlands and their surroundings.

There are some real differences, however, that both sides must understand for successful mutual collaboration:

- *While wetland managers have a long-term focus on conservation and sustainable use, tourism businesses have to deal with market demands that can change very quickly on short timescales.*
- *Many wetlands and other protected areas are managed by the public sector, and the general culture and bureaucracy of public sector organizations can result in much slower decision-making than tourism businesses would like.*
- *For valid conservation reasons, wetland managers may need to prevent or severely limit tourism to some sites or parts of sites.*

- *Tourism will not always be viable at all wetland sites, perhaps because of a lack of facilities and suitable infrastructure or because a site does not easily fit within itineraries that tourism businesses are able to market effectively.*

Effective interactions between the tourism sector and wetland managers occur when there is overlap between the conservation interests of wetland managers and the commercial realities of tourism businesses. Finding such common ground is best achieved through candid dialogue. Effective dialogue is helped when the roles of wetland management authorities and the objectives of wetland conservation are clearly defined in legislation and regulations.

1. Boat tour to explore Kakadu National Park
©Tourism Australia
2. Tropical beaches of Seychelles
© Monica Zavagli
3. Lagune de Porto-Novo Ramsar Site, near Cotonou, Benin
©Nassima Aghanim/Ramsar



AUSTRALIA'S LANDSCAPE PROGRAMME: A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE TOURISM AND THE CONSERVATION SECTORS

Australia's National Landscapes Programme provides opportunities to emphasise the importance of protected areas to Australia's \$95 billion tourism sector. The Programme, led by Parks Australia and Tourism Australia, is a national long-term strategic approach to tourism and conservation in Australia's most outstanding environments.

Two-thirds of Australia's international visitors participate in nature-based tourism experiences, and research conducted in 2010 by Tourism Australia confirms that Australia's nature is the greatest motivator for people to travel to Australia.

The Programme aims to:

- *promote Australia's world class, high quality visitor experiences;*
- *increase the value of tourism to regional economies;*
- *enhance the role of protected areas in those economies; and*
- *build support for protecting the natural and cultural assets.*

Essential to the success of the programme is the development of partnerships among tourism organizations and operators, protected area agencies, local councils, conservation groups, government agencies, and Indigenous communities. Working together these stakeholders are able to leverage their resources, define their points of difference, plan together, protect environmental values and promote their landscape for a common benefit.

Australia's National Landscapes include: Flinders Ranges, Kangaroo Island, The Kimberley*, Ningaloo-Shark Bay, the Great South West Edge*, Australia's Red Centre, Australia's Timeless North*, Greater Blue Mountains, Australia's Green Cauldron, Australian Alps*, the Great Ocean Road*, Australia's Coastal Wilderness and the Great Barrier Reef*. Candidate regions include: the Wet Tropics*, Tasmania* and Sydney Harbour*.

Tourism Australia, 2010. Driving Visitation to Australia Using Experience Themes

**Region includes a Ramsar Site*

For more details visit: www.tourism.australia.com/nl or www.environment.gov.au/parks/national-landscapes



THE BANYAN TREE GROUP: STEWARDSHIP OF SUSTAINABILITY

Banyan Tree Group is a leading hospitality brand that manages and develops premium resorts, hotels, residences and spas across 28 countries around the world. Since its inception, Banyan Tree has maintained the core value of driving sustainable development. The restoration of Bang Tao Bay in Phuket, Thailand, into an integrated restored wetland and resort, creating the first Banyan Tree flagship, is a striking example of how it operates.

In 1992, Bang Tao was an abandoned tin mine, highly polluted by toxic heavy metals. It was acquired by the company and the wasteland was brought back to life. Approximately USD 200 million (then Phuket's largest ever single investment) was spent in the transfer operation that required a complete change of soil conditions to support the reintroduction of more than 7,000 hardy native plants. Fruit and flowering trees were also added to attract birds and wildlife, and the lagoons, once polluted mining craters, soon brimmed with marine life.

The resort's water is provided by rain catchment lagoons within Laguna Phuket grounds. This water is treated and piped to the hotels, and the return waste water is cleaned and used in irrigation. This effectively creates a semi-closed water system requiring no withdrawal from local, municipal sources.

In addition to the successful ecological restoration, the creation of Laguna Phuket also boosted the local economy as the area's work force was retrained from the mining sector to construction and hospitality.

This creation of environmental and social value via business has continued with the opening of each new resort; through the creation of the Banyan Tree Global Foundation (BTGF) funds are invested toward group-wide initiatives and site-specific projects. Group-wide initiatives include:

- 1) actions to minimize resource consumption and reduce waste production;
- 2) planting of 2,000 trees per resort per year, raising environmental awareness and addressing local environmental needs; and
- 3) a bespoke youth development programme, Seedlings, which provides financial and experiential support to children aged 12 through 18 that come from disadvantaged backgrounds surrounding each resort.

The hotels also concentrate on the social factors that lead to environmental degradation by providing increased economic livelihoods for adults through the development of new sustainable local enterprises. This can be seen in areas such as Ringha in China, where the local villagers have been trained to lead treks and offer homestead hospitality, thus avoiding the need for environmental exploitation.

Source: David Campion, Director of Banyan Tree CSR operations



THE ACCOR HOTEL GROUP – TAKING ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Accor hotel group is present in 90 countries with 4,200 hotels and more than 500,000 rooms. The group recognizes that all of its hotels can take action to conserve the natural environment and minimize their ecological footprint. Working with IUCN the group has published *Biodiversity: My hotel in action – a guide to sustainable use of biological resources* (IUCN, 2008), a guide that introduces hoteliers to the concepts of biodiversity and ecosystem services and briefly examines the negative impacts of human behaviour on the environment. The chapters focus attention on the main aspects of a hotel's day-to-day operations that have an impact on the natural environment, with sections on:

- hotel restaurants and sustainable food sources;
- hotel grounds and gardens and the use of indigenous plants for landscaping, as well as minimizing light and noise;
- guest rooms and public areas and making use of sustainable materials; and
- promoting responsible recreation activities and excursions and supporting local biodiversity conservation efforts.

In April 2012 Accor launched its PLANET 21 programme through which the group is making 21 commitments in favour of sustainable development. These include commitments on reducing CO² emissions, reducing energy use, monitoring and controlling water usage, improving waste recycling practices, promoting sustainable building, supporting responsible purchasing practices, protecting ecosystems, etc. PLANET 21 has quantified its objectives for these commitments, which all the hotels must meet by 2015.

More information at www.accor.com/en/sustainable-development/the-planet-21-program.html

5.2 AREAS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN WETLAND MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES AND THE TOURISM SECTOR

Practical areas of interaction where cooperation between the wetland and the tourism sector can thrive include:

- *defining areas where different types of tourism can take place as well as areas where tourism is not permitted, including the formulation and implementation of regulations for tourism;*
- *establishing access points and visitor facilities;*
- *creating local businesses for tourism;*
- *providing good quality signage, guiding and interpretation; and*
- *marketing, branding and promotion of tourism.*

These elements are likely to affect the tourism potential of individual sites, as well as the impacts that tourism may have there.

5.2.1 Access

Tourism potential is heavily influenced by considerations of access.

Access is vital for tourism. While remote places are often very attractive to visitors, most people have limited time available for their travel, and if places are difficult or take a long time to reach, few tourists are likely to visit them however attractive they may be. Investments in developing tourism in such places may not be commercially viable. Of course it may be possible to create some exceptional tourism experiences and to find ways to make some of these places easier to reach – for example, by using helicopters or small aircraft – but this may require large investments with high operating costs, making tourism to such places affordable to only the most affluent tourists. One example where this type of tourism development has been implemented successfully is at the Fazenda Rio Negro ranch in Brazil's Pantanal wetlands: here upmarket tourism is combined with an ecological research station that offers

visitors the opportunity to interact with the research team. Access to the ranch for tourists is by small aircraft.

Most tourism takes place at sites that can be reached with reasonable ease, however, and in a relatively short time. This generally means that sites will be near transportation infrastructure, including airports and well-maintained roads, and in the case of domestic tourism, they will often be near centres of population. The tourism potential of wetland sites will generally be greater the nearer they are to good transport infrastructure and centres of population. Such sites face greater pressures, however, and necessitate strong management and enforcement of regulations, combined with a good working relationship with the tourism sector, to minimize adverse impacts from tourism.

*Spring-fed traditional Hammams
(hot baths) at Ichkeul Lake*
© Photos DGF



5.2.2 Visitor facilities

Provision of facilities for visitors can be used to control where tourism takes place within a site and so help to minimize adverse impacts.

Providing at least basic visitor facilities (for example toilets, washrooms, shelter, and garbage collection) is critical at all sites where tourism takes place. Tourism businesses and tourists will favour those sites where there are sufficient facilities of suitable type and quality in relation to visitor numbers, the activities taking place, and the costs for visitors. In addition, providing suitable facilities can help to reduce the adverse impacts of such nuisances as, for example, littering.

Some sites may also provide additional visitor facilities, for example restaurants, accommodation and souvenir shops, which can generate revenues additional to any entrance fees that

may be charged. Whether these are appropriate within any particular site depends on the availability of similar facilities nearby and the potential for additional facilities to be commercially viable. They may be built and operated either by wetland management authorities or by private businesses with concessions for which the businesses pay an annual fee to the site, under agreements which define what the businesses are allowed to do as well as minimum service levels. Such agreements are usually of finite duration and may be terminated if a business does not operate in accordance with its terms.

The provision of visitor facilities can be used to control where tourism takes place within a site — attracting tourists to locations where there will be minimal adverse impacts and away from more sensitive locations. Furthermore, the type, quality, and price range of additional facilities can be used to attract different types of tourists, from low numbers of high-spending visitors to larger numbers of those with lower budgets. Catering for different types of people requires different approaches and quality levels. By working with the local tourism sector, wetland managers can identify which types of visitors present the most appropriate market for a site, taking commercial as well as conservation factors into account.

PROVIDING FACILITIES FOR VISITORS TO WETLAND SITES

Everglades (USA)

The Park receives around one million visitors each year, who come to enjoy activities like wildlife viewing, especially birdwatching, hiking, kayaking, and sightseeing tours by boat and tram. Some recreational fishing is also allowed subject to Park regulations. Tourism facilities include 250 km of trails (including canoe trails), five elevated boardwalk trails, two campgrounds providing a total of 400 camping spaces and a further 48 designated backcountry campsites that are accessible by boat, five visitor centres, and two environmental education camps.

Ba Be Lake (Vietnam)

The Ba Be National Park management board has established and manages a visitor centre, a guest-house with 70 guest rooms, and two restaurants in the Park's Administration and Service Zone. This generates revenues of around 200 MVND (~10,000 USD) per year, and after payment of taxes, the balance is reinvested by the park. In addition, there are 21 community guesthouses and two souvenir shops in the village. Other tourism facilities have been developed through joint-venture investment or are owned and managed by local people or state enterprises.

Ichkeul (Tunisia)

Lake Ichkeul receives around 50,000 visits each year. The Park offers nature trails and guided excursions, a museum, sightseeing in the douars (tented camps) and local villages, birdwatching, mountain biking, caving, hiking and sports trekking on Djebel Ichkeul, which rises 500m above the lake and offers panoramic views of the marshes. The Park also includes Roman remains and natural hot springs close to the lake which feed traditional Hammams (hot baths). Some longer horse or camel trekking excursions around the edges of the lake are also available, with visitors camping overnight by the lake shore.

Skocjan Caves (Slovenia)

Major investments – around euro 430,000 between 1999 and 2010 – have been made to build a visitor centre and construct walkways and viewpoints within the caves. These facilities enable visitors to experience the caves in safety and help the caves withstand pressure from large numbers of visitors.

The Park has also constructed a range of tourist facilities above ground, including a restaurant, souvenir shops and toilets, a museum and walking and cycling trails. These facilities, combined with excellent information and interpretation, are important in maintaining the caves as a major tourist attraction and, through this, in generating significant amounts of income that is used for management of the regional Park, part of which is also distributed to local inhabitants for the maintenance of typical architecture and the cultural landscape.



The Feynan eco-lodge in the Dana Biosphere Reserve, owned by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, provides economic opportunities for local communities, generates revenue for conservation and offers an unparalleled opportunity to experience Jordan's wilderness and ancient history
© Monica Zavagli

5.2.3 Local businesses supporting tourism

Support by wetland managers for local businesses and communities to help them better provide local tourism services brings important long-term conservation benefits.

A supporting infrastructure of local businesses that can provide goods and services to visitors is frequently a vital ingredient for successful tourism. Unless visitors are sure that they can find suitable nearby accommodation, restaurants, local transportation, or guides, few are likely to visit a site. These features are even more important for tour operators when they plan itineraries for tour packages. A lack of adequate local services can dissuade tour operators from including sites within their tour packages.

Tourism linked to local businesses thus helps ensure the availability of the goods and services necessary for successful tourism operations. It can provide the 'authenticity' or opportunity to experience ways in which others live — an important experience for many visitors.

It can sometimes be difficult for national or regional tourism businesses to develop links with individual communities and local businesses, but wetland managers are well placed to act as a bridge between them and the communities living in and around their sites.

Those sites where significant tourism is taking place should have at least one member of the site management staff with designated responsibility for tourism supervision, who will act as that point of contact between the site personnel, local tourism businesses and communities, and the tourism sector generally. To be able to support and manage tourism successfully, wetland management staff need training and expertise in working with the tourism sector, particularly with local tourism businesses, along with their traditional expertise in conservation management.

Some wetland managers work with local communities and tourism businesses to encourage improvements in local goods and services offered. For example, communities in and around Ibera marshes (Argentina) have received support to establish municipal nature trails, and local tourist guides have also been trained. In Soomaa (Estonia), there is an active business development programme to support and improve standards in local tourism businesses. As well as benefiting local communities and building local support for conservation, the sites that do this also influence the supporting infrastructure for tourism, so that it is more appropriate for the types and levels of tourism encouraged at these sites. Improvements in the quality and diversity of services that local tourism businesses offer increase the possibility of generating interest in the site more widely.



*The islets of Tubbataha Reefs offer breeding and feeding grounds for endemic and endangered bird species
©Teri Aquino*

BUILDING LINKS BETWEEN WETLANDS AND LOCAL TOURISM BUSINESSES

Skocjan Caves (Slovenia)

As part of its work on tourism, the Skocjan Caves Park Public Service Agency promotes the Park in Slovenia and abroad; it is identifying opportunities to expand and enrich tourism within the Park and to increase local employment by promoting the region's heritage and monuments and by establishing local tourism businesses, such as small accommodation facilities. The Park agency works with local tourist associations to improve tourism 'products', for example, by encouraging traditional agriculture and ecologically-oriented food production for sale to tourists.

Tubbataha (Philippines)

Dive boat operators in the region have formed an association to deal with safety and crisis management issues at sea, and to streamline cooperation amongst themselves and with the Park. The Park works closely with the Association and in the future will require dive operators wishing to gain access to the Park to become Association members. It also runs seminars and briefings that operators and guides are required to attend annually in order to retain their entry permits. Additionally, the Department of Tourism is expected to require all dive boat operators to seek accreditation with the Philippine Commission on Sports Scuba Diving, which will help to ensure that all dive operators meet high standards, including of reef protection practices.

Kakadu (Australia)

The Park works closely with Tourism Australia and Tourism Northern Territories and with Tourism Top End (TTE), a non-profit association with over 550 members drawn from businesses, individuals and organizations committed to the growth of tourism in the 'Top End' (northern Australia). Many of Kakadu's tourism operators are members of TTE. The tourism industry is under commercial pressure for sites and activities to be available for visitors as much as possible, but in a site like Kakadu, cultural factors and extreme weather conditions, crocodile management and post wet season road maintenance mean that it is difficult to meet the industry's expectations of access. Park management seek to educate the tourism business about the reasons behind sites or activities not being available as much as they would like, through industry newsletters, meetings, and a compulsory training programme for all guides leading tours in Kakadu.



5.2.4 Interpretation and guiding

Tour operators promote those sites where visitors receive good experiences and services: high quality guiding and interpretation of a site can play an important part in achieving those results.

Tourists visit wetlands for many different reasons – some come for rest and relaxation, whilst others want more active experiences of the unique natural and cultural features of a site and so wish to go birdwatching or diving or seek out wildlife.

Interpretation and guiding are important for both types of visitor. When done well, this can greatly

enhance the experience of visiting a site. It also provides opportunities to explain local conservation and wise use issues, and thus to influence tourists to behave in ways that help protect the site (for example, by demonstrating how to avoid damaging corals or disturbing wildlife).

Information about the site can be provided to visitors through brochures, visitor centres, nature trails with associated signage and information boards, web pages, and guided excursions (some of which may take tourists into more sensitive parts of sites where they would not be permitted unaccompanied).

USING INFORMATION AND GUIDING FOR VISITOR MANAGEMENT

La Conejera (Colombia)

Working with local stakeholders, including local communities, the Foundation Humedal La Conejera (FHLC) has developed a Regulation entitled “Manual de convivencia para la sostenibilidad del humedal” [Manual of coexistence for the sustainability of the wetland], which covers public use of the site. Development of these regulations using a participatory approach has helped ensure that visitors accept and keep to the regulations – for example, by not leaving garbage in the wetlands and avoiding undue disturbance to wildlife. Generally visitors show a deep respect for the site.

Access is controlled and directed according to the recommendations contained in the site’s Environmental Management Plan, keeping within the carrying capacity that has been established based on the current conditions of the ecosystem and the public access area. Access to the wetland’s public areas is controlled and directed by trained guides, who are generally students of natural or environmental science. FHLC provides guided tours to see the site’s wildlife and natural landscape, and operates a successful programme to enable visitors and local residents contribute to on-going environmental management.

Parc national du “W” (Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger)

Within the framework of the ‘Sustainable Tourism–Eliminating Poverty’ project, and with a contribution provided through the Ramsar Swiss Grant for Africa, UNWTO organized a one-week training seminar in 2011 on birdwatching and environmental awareness in the transborder Parc “W”, a wetland area covering parts of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The training was attended by fifteen guides (five from each country), as well as five forest officers who work in the Park. Participants were trained in bird identification and tour guiding, and they received advice on how to act as champions for biodiversity conservation in their communities. As a follow-up activity, three birdwatching platforms will be constructed in the Park (one in each country) and environmental awareness-raising workshops will be organized for the communities living in the Park’s buffer zone.

>> See Ramsar Handbook 6: Wetland CEPA



5.2.5 Marketing, branding and promotion

Marketing and promotion are important for attracting visitors, but they need to be compatible with the types and levels of tourism that can be supported without adverse impacts at a site.

Marketing, branding and promotion are central to informing potential tourists about the tourism 'products' and experiences that are available at any destination. Different destinations specialize in different types of tourism, and each will appeal more to some people than to others. For example, some people may be looking for relaxation and shopping in urban destinations, while others may be seeking specialized wildlife experiences, such as whale- or birdwatching. Some may have very restricted budgets, whilst others may have substantial budgets and prefer a kind of luxury tourism. Part of tourism marketing, branding and promotion involves targeting

selected market segments in order to attract sufficient numbers of the suitable types of tourists to visit a particular site.

Marketing, branding and promotion are closely linked:

- **marketing** comprises all activities near to the point at which customers purchase tourism packages or particular tourism goods and services;
- **promotion** covers activities designed to ensure that the widest possible range of potential customers know what tourism products are available at a destination; and

- **branding** involves creating a simple image, name and reputation that are then used to help market and promote a region, group of tourism 'products' and businesses, or individual businesses.

Reaching the market involves a range of activities, including advertising, attendance at national, regional or international tourism fairs, web-based promotions (including social media), and hosting familiarization trips to show particular destinations and experiences to tour operators, travel agents, and journalists. These activities require detailed planning and preparation and generally require sizable budgets.

MARKETING WETLAND TOURISM

Skocjan Caves (Slovenia)

The Skocjan Caves Park Public Service Agency promotes the caves through a website, brochures, books and other publications; workshops, tourism markets, and advertisements; and cooperation with other protected areas in the region, including other UNESCO World Heritage and Ramsar Sites. The caves' internationally recognized status of World Heritage and Ramsar Site is used for promotion of the site.

Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (Romania)

The management authority for the Delta, the local authorities and tourism businesses undertake some direct marketing opportunities such as national fairs, where domestic tourism is important, but also international fairs. In addition a management committee on tourism has been set up to coordinate many aspects of tourism, including marketing.

In Kenya, **Lake Nakuru** features as one of the country's 'Premium Parks' and is used to help market Kenya as a tourism destination by both the national tourism board and the management authority, the Kenya Wildlife Service.

In the **Ibera Marshes (Argentina)**, tourism around Lake Ibera and Colonia Carlos Pellegrini is marketed by the local Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with the municipality.



1. Estuary of river Gaula at Trondheim fjord, part of the Trondheimfjord Ramsar Site, Norway
©Tobias Salathé
2. Humedales de la Bahía de Bluefields Ramsar Site, Nicaragua
©Ramsar Secretariat
3. Lake Uvs and its surrounding wetlands, Mongolia
© WWF International/Anton Vorauer
4. Poleski National Park, Poland
© Ramsar Secretariat
5. Grybaulia fishponds, Lithuania
© Tobias Salathé
6. Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) in Sablatnigmoor Ramsar Site, Austria
© Thomas Schneditz
7. Photographers in the Danube Delta
©Peter Lengyel

National and regional tourism boards, and tourism businesses – particularly tour operators, travel agents and large accommodation and travel companies – build up the detailed marketing knowledge necessary for them to undertake tourism marketing, branding and promotion. While wetland managers may have a good knowledge of the types of visitors and their interests at their sites, they are unlikely to have a detailed knowledge of wider tourism markets, or sufficient funds to undertake major marketing programmes.

By working with tourism professionals, wetland managers will gain better insights into market trends and ways in which tourism at their sites can be marketed, branded and promoted most effectively to reach wider audiences if desirable.

For some wetlands, such as the Everglades National Park (USA), the direct public funding of marketing activities is prohibited and so all such

activities have to be carried out by tourism businesses and other organizations. The Everglades' local municipalities run major tourism promotion programmes. Other sites such as the Skocjan Caves (Slovenia) and the Danube Delta (Romania) have assumed significant direct roles in tourism marketing and promotion.

Whether or not a site itself is directly responsible for specific marketing and promotion activities, all sites need to ensure that marketing and promotion is compatible with the types and levels of tourism that can be supported without incurring adverse impacts. It should also generate the greatest benefits for conservation and local communities. Even sites with no direct role in marketing and promotion can develop activities – such as environmental education in the case of the Everglades – that reinforce marketing and promotion by others.

Marketing, branding and promotion can also be used to spread tourism across a site network. This reduces pressures and risks of adverse impacts on the most popular sites and spreads the economic benefits from tourism to more communities. Currently, the Kenya Wildlife Service is developing a programme to encourage more tourism at those protected areas with lower visitation so as to reduce pressure on the more popular destinations. This programme includes developing tourism around other Rift Valley lakes to help reduce visitor pressures on Lake Nakuru, and encouraging tourists to extend the duration of their stay so that they can visit more sites within the Rift Valley.



*Wildlife viewing on the shores of
Nakuru National Park
©akrono*



Ramsar Site signboard at Port Launay
©Environment Department, Seychelles.



Port Launay Ramsar Site
©Environment Department – Seychelles

MARKETING OF TOURISM IN WETLAND SITES

Port Launay (Seychelles)

Management of Port Launay is undertaken jointly by the adjacent Euphoria Resort and Sustainability for Seychelles, a local nongovernmental organization. The Euphoria Resort is a five star hotel set in a 300-acre (120 ha) nature reserve and situated on two beaches overlooking Port Launay Marine Reserve. By helping to protect the Reserve, the Euphoria Resort maintains the high quality environment and landscape that is an important part of the resort's attraction for tourists, and which is emphasized in its marketing.

Tubbataha (Philippines)

The Park works closely with the Philippines Department of Tourism to market Tubbataha internationally. The Park's management board is trying to diversify tourism within the Park given the importance of tourism both for generating revenues for conservation and for providing benefits to local communities from income and employment opportunities. Possibilities to open the park and surrounding areas to other water sports, such as snorkeling, kayaking, kite boarding, or windsurfing, are also being considered. This will involve assessing the impacts of such activities on the fragile reef ecosystem and surface wildlife and habitats, and evaluating the need for new guidelines for regulation of those activities, with a particular emphasis on zoning.

The Park is already encouraging more nature-focused activities include birdwatching, dolphin and whale watching, and reef observation from glass-bottomed boats. These new activities are expected to generate additional revenues for the Park and increase appreciation of the marine environment. They will also bring additional local employment opportunities, and the Park is assisting with training the local guides to lead these activities.



RAMSAR AS A QUALITY LABEL

Several countries have been using the Ramsar logo as a quality label to inform the public that they are implementing the approaches promoted by the Convention. “Ramsar Sites” are Wetlands of International Importance that correspond to specific criteria and are inscribed in the global Ramsar List, which contains more than 2,000 sites, formally designated by 160 countries. Together they constitute the largest global network of protected areas.

Ramsar Sites are normally the subject of integrated management plans, and interventions should be based on participatory processes among stakeholder groups, including local communities and indigenous people. Ramsar Sites are showpieces for the implementation of national wetland wise use (sustainable use) policies, in some ways “the jewels in the crown” of a country’s wetlands. Increasingly this is publicly advertised with the Ramsar logo being displayed on information panels, worn by local staff, and included as an integral part of relevant communication and education activities.

Specific quality criteria and minimum threshold values have not yet been defined, but several countries have started thinking about a quality concept for “Ramsar Communes” to distinguish public authorities and business partners who follow the Ramsar guidance and apply sustainability criteria for their integrated approach to managing Ramsar Sites (and other wetlands) in view of the tourism requirements and pressures. In Norway, Oerland municipality hosts a coastal Ramsar Site and is proudly explaining its services, values and connections with other Ramsar Sites (e.g., through migratory birds) with a public exhibition in the town hall and explanatory panels in selected “Ramsar Suites” in the nearby hotel. The Austrian commune of Purbach on the edge of Lake Neusiedl-Fertő, a Transboundary Ramsar Site shared with Hungary, opened a “Ramsar Centre” to inform tourists and other visitors about the commune’s natural heritage, sell local products, and advertise cultural events.

Increasingly Ramsar Site managers display the Ramsar Convention logo prominently to inform tourists and local visitors about their implementation of the Ramsar management principles for the wise use of wetland ecosystems and their resources. These are first concrete steps towards the establishment of quality criteria for a “Ramsar Label” for sustainable wetland tourism that could eventually be globally applied as a definite distinction for the application of sustainable wetland tourism management principles, to serve as a quality brand and marketing tool.



Tourists admiring an underground canyon
©Borut Lozej, Archive of the Park Skocjan Caves

6. PLANNING AND POLICIES FOR WETLANDS AND TOURISM

National, regional and local planning and policies are key factors in environmental conservation and in ensuring that tourism contributes equitably to the development of the local economy.

Tourism develops in many different ways, but one common feature is that where tourism is allowed to expand too rapidly in any area, social and environmental issues have often not been properly considered. Additionally, potential benefits for local communities are reduced both as a result

of adverse environmental impacts and because rapid expansion relies more on importing trained staff than on training local people, thus reducing the employment opportunities available to them. The speed, scale and type of tourism development are major factors in determining whether

or not tourism is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, and are generally influenced by government decisions. As a result, government planning and policies are major influences on whether or not tourism is successful and sustainable for the long term in any destination.

6.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Appropriate legislation and its effective enforcement is important to prevent damage to the environment and to tourism assets, to protect the rights of host communities and enable them to benefit from tourism, and to ensure that future development of tourism is only permitted where it will be sustainable.

Conservation and wise use needs to be supported by clear policies and regulations applying to all stakeholders, wetland users and others whose actions may have an impact on wetlands. Laws and policies related to environmental protection, planning and land uses at national, regional or local levels provide an essential framework for all relevant decision making. Such a framework ideally sets out the processes that public authorities apply to planning and approval of development proposals. They should also specify minimum standards and requirements with which developments must comply in order to be permitted.

As context, it is important that they state the general objectives and commitments of the government, for example in relation to sustainable development and the need for public consultation. This and related legislation – such as for biodiversity – generally gives public authorities a range of responsibilities. For example, legislation may allow local authorities to limit particular types of development or to set specific local requirements (additional to the general requirements of national legislation or policies).

Governments may also develop specific legislation to cover economic sectors, such as tourism,

or specific sites or types of sites, such as wetlands. Many governments have adopted some form of legislation that applies to tourism, including provisions for setting up national tourism boards, undertaking national planning and tourism marketing, establishing minimum standards for different types of tourism, and implementing licensing schemes for tourism businesses.

As well as specific legislation for the tourism sector, legislation designed to protect the general environment applies to all sectors, including the tourism sector, and its effective enforcement is vital for maintaining the high environmental quality that destinations need to remain attractive to tourists. One obvious area is preventing pollution by requiring businesses and public authorities to treat solid and liquid wastes and dispose of them responsibly. Effective implementation of such legislation is particularly important in maintaining water quality and the general attractiveness of coasts, rivers and lakes for tourists, as well as for maintaining the ecological services these wetland habitats provide. In many regions, however, rapid tourism development outpaces the implementation of effective environmental protection measures, risking damaging the

very resources that attract tourists. For example, according to UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan programme, some 48% of urban centres around the Mediterranean lack sewage treatment facilities and around 80% of wastewater is disposed of in the sea untreated. This problem is even greater in resort areas in other parts of the world, such as the Caribbean or Southeast Asia. As well as creating health risks to tourists and local people, such contamination is harmful to the marine environment, including nearby coral reefs, and in extreme cases can lead to the formation of 'dead zones' in which most marine life, including productive fish stocks, has been destroyed.

At the site level legal frameworks can be helpful in preventing uncontrolled development of tourism. The tourism activities in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve are authorized by the Regulation and Licenses Department within DDBRA, which also sets regulations for tourist boats and floating hotels, including requirements for management, collection and disposal of all liquid and solid wastes. Regulations also protect bird colonies and nesting birds and control the commercial and sport fishing that is allowed in the Reserve.

>> See Ramsar Handbook 3: Laws and institutions



6.2 WETLAND AND TOURISM POLICIES

Well-conceived national and local policies for tourism are crucial and must fit comfortably within wider strategic policies related to land use.

It is important that wetland policies consider tourism as a relevant ecosystem service. Governments have been increasingly recognizing the value of wetlands and the ecosystem services they provide and many countries have developed specific policies for water and wetland management.

Most countries have a ministry or public body that has responsibilities for wetlands. These bodies can play an important role in working with the tourism sector to prepare and implement coherent national or regional policies and approaches for tourism.

Tourism combined with other wetland services can often be economically as well as environmentally preferable to other land uses. This is demonstrated by the following examples:

- *The Everglades (USA), where one of the world's largest environmental restoration projects is underway to restore the ecosystem and the flood control services it supplies, as well as to protect it as a tourism resource for South Florida's economy.*
- *The Danube Delta (Romania), where economically and environmentally disastrous attempts at agriculture and fish farming during the 1980s have been reversed, and the areas returned to conservation with nature-based tourism.*

- *In Tubbataha (Philippines), where, as in many reef systems around the world, tourism is combined with efforts to improve the sustainability of local and regional fisheries: there are studies that show that the protection of some reef areas for tourism – with no fishing permitted – benefits overall fisheries productivity in the surrounding waters, providing a better long-term income for fishers alongside the additional income that tourism brings.*

Considerable progress in raising awareness about the value of wetland ecosystem services, and their integration into decision-making processes, has been made thanks to the widely recognized reports such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) and The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (2010). These provide recommendations for improvements to planning approaches, policies and decision-making by governments, to ensure that the value of ecological services and the environments and biodiversity that provide them are fully evaluated and considered, and that decisions are based on long-term sustainability.

Namibia's Policy on tourism and wildlife concessions on state land recognizes that concessions are a means of providing access for tourists to parts of protected areas that are ordinarily not accessible, diversifying the range of opportunities on offer to tourists. Most importantly, it provides the policy support for the creation of opportunities for business development and the economic empowerment of formerly disadvantaged Namibians through access to tourism, hunting and industries based on wild plant and animal resources.

Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2007

National and local governments can act to control how much and what type of tourism is developed and where and how fast it is developed. Planning regulations are likely already to require environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for any significant developments, including tourism facilities, and to set limits on what can be constructed and where – for example, prohibiting construction on steep slopes or within a certain distance of the coast. Planning regulations may also include provisions for the types and sizes of constructions that are permitted in various areas, may specify zones for particular types of development, and may include specific protection for wetlands and other sensitive habitats. Conservation legislation – including that covering wetlands – will normally also be taken into account in the planning process, and may prohibit or limit development in certain localities.

Unfortunately, existing planning regulations are not always enforced effectively, and in some cases may be out-of-date or inadequate. For example, the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 destroyed large numbers of buildings, including hotels, which were constructed in vulnerable areas and insufficiently set back from the coast. Inappropriate siting of construction can also

destroy natural environmental features. Another example: an estimated three-quarters of the sand dunes on the Mediterranean coast of Spain have been destroyed by urban development – primarily by tourist resorts.

As well as implementing planning regulations, governments or government agencies may also formulate policies for tourism that are generally designed to encourage development of particular types of tourism – for example, tourism in protected areas, coastal tourism or rural tourism. These policies will ideally be developed in dialogue with the tourism sector, and particularly local tourism businesses. They should provide a framework for ensuring environmental protection and tourism benefits for local communities, as well as encouraging coherent development of the most appropriate types of tourism.

Policies need to focus on those aspects of tourism for which a country or destination has the greatest market advantage, taking into account market demand, available natural and cultural assets, the capacity of local tourism businesses, and the wishes of the communities affected. For example, Namibia has a national tourism policy focused on attracting high-value, low-volume tourism based on its unique landscapes, with tourism lodges

within community-owned conservancies. In contrast, the counties and destination management organizations of southern Florida (USA) have policies designed to attract high-volume tourism in all price brackets.

The different policies are designed to maximize the overall benefits that particular regions and their communities are able to generate from tourism, whilst keeping the level of tourism within sustainable limits: if implemented properly, they also help to maintain or build a distinctive market position for tourism in a particular country or destination.

A LAST WORD

We have seen some of the many ways in which tourism can be enormously beneficial for both national and local governments and the communities living in and around wetlands and for the wetlands themselves. We have also seen, however, that unless it is well-planned and well-managed, tourism can have very harmful impacts upon the people involved, the ecosystem services that wetlands provide for them, the wildlife, and the natural beauty of the place. Given the crucial importance of sustainability in tourist development and operations, we've reviewed examples of the successful incorporation of clear, realistic plans and objectives, the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in decision making, the synergies that can be achieved through collaboration amongst wetland managers, local communities and businesspeople, and the

tourism industry. And finally, we've been able to consider the role of supportive legislation and policy frameworks, clearly understood and reliably enforced, in providing the context within which successful wetland tourism can grow and mature.

This brief review is not meant, however, to explore these subjects in great depth or provide a step-by-step prescription for such success. Rather, it has tried only to show that wetland conservation and modern tourism can be wedded in ways that are mutually beneficial, and to point to the most important concepts that will repay further investigation. Many of the resources listed in the following section will be helpful in that investigation, and will surely lead on to additional resources elsewhere.





A view of Korzok village by Lake Tsomoriri; one of the few highest permanent settlements in the world
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ANNEX

The Case Studies: an overview of their natural features and tourist activities.

The full texts of the case studies include considerable detail on the scale of tourism and how it is being managed. They can be viewed on the Ramsar website at www.ramsar.org/tourism

	Wetland name	Wetland features	Types of tourism
1	Ibera Marshes ARGENTINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,300,000 ha • Ramsar Site no.1162 (24,550 ha) • Lakes, marshes, river and forests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 17,100 visitors/year (in the Ramsar Site only) • Boating, kayaking, hiking, nature trails, wildlife watching, horse riding
2	Kakadu National Park AUSTRALIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,979,766 ha • Ramsar Site no. 204 • UNESCO World Heritage Site • Forested wetlands, saltmarsh, mudflats, springs, seasonal freshwater marshes, mangroves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 175,000 – 225,000 visitors/year • interpretive walks, indigenous art tours, boat cruises, guided bushwalks
3	Abroghos Marine National Park BRAZIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91,300 ha • Ramsar Site no. 1902 • Coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangroves, beaches, sandbanks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 5,000 visitors/year • Scuba diving, snorkeling, wildlife watching, short nature trail on one of the islands
4	Humedal la Conejera COLOMBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 59 ha • River, marshland and forest enclave within urban area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 16,000 visitors/year • Nature trails, guided walks, relaxation, participation in ecological restoration
5	Soomaa ESTONIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39,639 ha • Ramsar Site no. 912 • Raised bogs, rivers, swamp forests, floodplain meadows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 45,000 visitors/year • Boardwalks, canoeing, guided walks, wildlife watching, cultural experience
6	Tsomoriri INDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12,000 ha • Ramsar Site no. 1213 • High altitude freshwater lake and marshes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 20,000- visitors/year • wildlife watching, trekking, jeep safaris, home stays, cultural experience, remote experience
7	Lake Nakuru KENYA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18,800 ha • Ramsar Site no. 476 • UNESCO World Heritage Site • Shallow alkaline lake in an enclosed basin, surrounded by marshes, grassland and forest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 250,000 visitors/year • Wildlife watching, sightseeing tours, self-guided vehicle tours, trail walks
8	Tubbataha Reefs natural Park PHILIPPINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96,828 ha • Ramsar Site no. 1010 • UNESCO World Heritage Site • Coral reefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 1,400 visitors/year • Scuba diving
9	Danube Delta ROMANIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 580,000 ha • Ramsar Site no. 521 (647,000 ha) • River, delta, river and marine levees, floodplains, brackish lake and lagoon complex, beaches, dunes and coastal waters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 50,000-73,000 visitors/year • Floating hotels, boat trips, canoeing, wildlife watching, rural tourism and home stays, fishing, photo safaris, beach tourism, local cultural experience, rest and relaxation, camping
10	Port Launay Coastal Wetlands SEYCHELLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 121 ha • Ramsar Site no. 1432 • Mangroves, mud flats and streams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 4,000 visitors/year • Beach tourism, canoeing, guided walks, sightseeing and beautiful sunsets
11	Skocjan Caves SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41,300 ha • Ramsar Site no. 991 (650 ha) • UNESCO World Heritage Site • River catchment with meadows, forests, floodplains, karst underground water cave system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 95,000 – 100,000 visitors/year • Cycling tours, educational trails, guided cave tours, walking
12	Ichkeul TUNISIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12,600 ha • Ramsar Site no. 213 • UNESCO World Heritage Site • Lake surrounded by Mediterranean scrub and forest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 50,000 visitors/year • Nature trails, guided excursions, birdwatching, sightseeing, caving, hiking, horse and camel trekking
13	Ba-Be Lake VIETNAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10,480 ha • Ramsar Site no. 1938 • Freshwater lake surrounded by forests and limestone karst landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~24,000 visitors/year • Boat tours, homestays, guided tours, cultural experience, sightseeing, birdwatching
14	Everglades UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 621,000 ha • Ramsar Site no. 374 (566,143 ha) • UNESCO World Heritage Site • Freshwater and wet prairies, sub-tropical forests, saltmarshes, mangrove forests, beach, dunes, brackish water estuaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~ 1,000,000 visitors/year • Canoeing, boat tours, elevated boardwalks, hiking trails, camping, wildlife watching, fishing, bicycle tours, houseboats



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