

Protected areas as drivers for sustainable tourism

Draft Message from WG2 on Tourism and Environmental Education in Protected Areas

Tourism¹ and the natural and cultural heritage within protected areas are inextricably linked in a global business partnership of significant economic proportions. Travel and tourism's direct contribution to world GDP and employment in 2012 was 2.1 trillion USD and 101 million jobs. These figures balloon out to 6.6 trillion USD and 260 million jobs representing 9% of global GDP when one considers the indirect economic contribution. A staggering 1 in 11 jobs worldwide are associated with the tourism sector which is forecast to grow at 4.4% p.a. over the next decade, a pace outstripping overall global economic growth.²

In percentage growth terms, Asia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa were amongst the fastest growing destination markets in 2012. South East Asia (7.3%) was the fastest growing region in terms of travel and tourism's contribution to total GDP and half of the growth in total travel and tourism employment (4 million jobs) was in Asia alone. Three of the four top performing tourism economies in the world were in Asia – Korea, Indonesia and China.²

The World Travel & Tourism Council notes that *“Asia will continue to lead growth of the global Travel & Tourism industry over the next decade, with annual average growth of over 6%. Asia's growth will be driven by increasing wealth among its middle classes. This will impact on the wider global industry via increased destination competition but also create opportunities to grow outbound spending. Destinations within and outside Asia will need to be prepared to invest in infrastructure suitable for these new sources of demand to achieve the clear growth potential that exists”*².

The tourism sector is highly diversified, however, nature and culture based tourism in and around protected areas has continued to be a growth area. The above forecasts for Asian tourism growth both within and outside the region amply reflect increasing affluence, leisure time and mobility leading to greater visitor pressure on the Region's protected areas.³ The dramatic increases in domestic visits to several Chinese sites following World Heritage inscription attest to this phenomenon. Across Asia efforts to promote tourism, especially ecotourism, have been actively made in protected areas as a means to support the livelihoods of neighboring residents.

Planning, accommodating, managing the impacts of and capturing the benefits from the use of protected areas by tourists and other visitors was a pervasive topic woven throughout the 2003 Vth IUCN World Parks Congress (WPC). Tourism was treated as a cross-cutting issue at the WPC with tourism aspects cross referenced across all of the major WPC legacy outputs and a specific WPC Recommendation adopted on the topic of tourism as a vehicle for conservation and support of protected areas⁴. In addition the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Programme of Work on Protected Areas notes the positive contribution that protected areas make to tourism and the opportunities that exist to enhance this.⁵

Properly planned and managed, tourism can bring a range of benefits to both conservation and local people. Well-managed tourism brings direct financial benefits to protected areas and creates a supportive clientele who value and champion the worth of parks. There are

several outstanding examples in Asia where local people are indeed deriving huge benefits from tourism in protected areas. Effective tourism programmes in protected areas can also enhance important education for sustainable development (ESD) initiatives.

Protected area systems which are optimizing their tourism potential are in a stronger position to garner stronger support from Governments who become convinced of the economic contribution these areas make to national accounts. Conversely, poorly coordinated tourism can have disastrous consequences for parks with uncontrolled use pressures, unregulated tourism infrastructure development, poor marketing and poor visitor experiences all leading to a culture of exploitation rather than stewardship. In some cases opportunistic tourism activities may appear to be superficially benefiting local communities, however, without careful management these activities can deplete resources, adversely affect the cultural sensibilities of local communities and ultimately deliver only short lived benefits.

Many protected area site managers are suspicious of the tourism industry and understandably adopt defensive positions regarding the sector. Furthermore provincial and local tourism development aspirations can often ignore or override conservation considerations and the capacity of parks to deal with tourism use. These are familiar concerns in many areas of the world but nowhere more so than in Asia. The growth in protected area coverage across Asia has been impressive, however, many countries are struggling to find the resources to effectively manage these areas in the midst of competing priorities for public funding such as health, education, security and poverty alleviation. Increasingly governments are looking to tourism as a means to supplement or even replace scarce government funding. Africa has traditionally led the way on generating income from nature based tourism in protected areas and several African protected area agencies are almost wholly funded from tourism revenues.³ In Asia most protected areas are still heavily reliant on government funding and, with a few notable exceptions, tourism development has either not been optimised or benefits are not returned to the parks themselves.

Contemporary protected area practice calls for client focused protected area institutions and staff with new skill sets which allow them to engage with the tourism sector on an equal footing. Protected area policies, management and staff capacities need to improve to address issues such as:

- strategic policy and planning for tourism including park business planning;
- improved visitor management;
- improved interpretation, communication and awareness raising;
- better planned and environmentally sympathetic tourism infrastructure development;
- building stronger relationships with the tourism industry to establish healthy productive partnerships; and
- deepening the understanding of tourism benefits and how these can be equitably distributed to support *inter-alia* the welfare of local communities and so augment livelihoods.

In light of this, PARTICIPANTS in the Working Group on Tourism and Environmental Education in Protected Areas at the 1st Asia Parks Congress, in Sendai, Japan (14- 17 November, 2013) commend to those international organizations, governments, NGOs, CBOs, academic institutions, businesses and donors who influence directly and indirectly the future of protected areas the following set of best practice protected area policy and management principles:

1. Respect that the paramount role of protected areas is to conserve nature with associated ecosystem service and cultural values as enshrined in the IUCN definition of a protected area⁶ and ensure that any tourism use is compatible with this role. Tourism strategies and programmes within and adjacent to protected areas should foster a culture of resource stewardship rather than exploitation.
2. Develop tourism strategies and business plans for protected areas in collaboration with relevant rightsholders and stakeholders and in the context of national, provincial and local development plans. Strategies and plans should recognize the wider spectrum of tourism opportunities outside of the protected areas themselves.
3. Seek to minimize the negative impacts and optimize the positive benefits of tourism in protected areas. This should include:
 - a) adopting a do-no-harm approach to tourism use and development;
 - b) respecting the precautionary principle⁷ when considering the impacts of tourism development and use;
 - c) strictly adhering to environmental impact assessment processes (EIA), both the letter of the law and in spirit, to mitigate negative impacts and optimize positive impacts;
 - d) ensuring tourism infrastructure is designed and developed to be environmentally and culturally sensitive and where possible located outside of protected areas and/or environmentally sensitive core zones.
 - e) managing visitor demand and access particularly in heavily used protected areas using a combination of mechanisms to regulate visitor impact, manage physical access and zonings, apply market based tools, apply booking systems and innovative transport solutions; and
 - f) promoting conservation awareness through an array of park interpretation services.
4. Care should be exercised to plan and manage for access to and within protected areas. Evidence suggests that opening up remote areas and their resident communities to increased access can have profound impacts on protected areas.⁸
5. Promote the development and use of tourism industry guidelines, codes of conduct and charters to raise industry standards and compliance with environmental safeguards. Examples include the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas⁹ or the Green Fins Initiative in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ Such initiatives parallel the development of protected area management effectiveness, quality assurance and certification initiatives such as the IUCN Green List of Well-Managed Protected Areas¹¹ and efforts should be made to harmonise these for mutual tourism and conservation benefit. Only tour operators and travel agents who have committed to a specific code of conduct should be permitted to operate within protected areas. This would help to regulate high visitation impacts and so promote a culture of stewardship. In highly sensitive areas visitor access should be only allowed if accompanied by a guide certified by the protected area authority.
6. Work with the tourism industry, relevant rightsholders and stakeholders to ensure that tourism benefits are equitably and appropriately distributed. In particular to ensure that:

- a) tourism invests directly in the protection and management of protected areas which are the foundation assets of tourism businesses; and
 - b) tourism contributes to local economies and the livelihoods of local people through support to local businesses, local employment, local procurement of goods and services and fair and equitable partnerships with local people.
7. Adopt the IUCN principles of good governance¹² when dealing with tourism planning and development in and adjacent to protected areas. Elements include legitimacy and voice; direction; performance; accountability; and fairness and rights. Effective tourism development in protected areas can strengthen local communities through building better relationships within and between communities and bestowing pride in their region and their identity.
 8. Support education for sustainable development in partnership with local people to develop authentic and creative tourism product/experiences which respect the natural and cultural values of the protected area. Tourism product should take into account visitor demand but not be blindly driven to respond to all types of demand. Stronger partnerships with indigenous peoples and traditional owners should be pursued to develop ethically sound tourism experience which explores deeper cultural associations between humans and the land. More innovative use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) can enhance tourism experiences and ESD. Efforts should concentrate on converting satisfied park visitors to become more informed supporters of protected areas.
 9. Invest in enhanced institutional and individual capacity to create client-focussed and business-aware protected area institutions, staff, rightsholders and stakeholders thereby improving understanding between protected area and tourism sectors. Conversely sensitize the tourism sector to conservation issues to place the relationship on a more equal footing. Capacity investment should also target local communities who may not have the know-how and resources to develop quality tourism product and services in and around protected areas.
 10. Governments should not lose sight of their obligations to adequately staff and fund protected areas despite the increasing reliance on revenue generated from tourism and visitor use. Protected areas are established first and foremost for conservation and not as tourist attractions. It is imperative that governments continue to invest in protected areas for the benefit of society at large.
 11. Invest in collaborative research and development on environmentally sustainable and ethical tourism including development of green infrastructure within and surrounding protected areas. Such research should focus on better understanding the links between tourism and conservation with findings appropriately integrated back into protected area and tourism policy and management.

¹ Tourism and park visitation are used interchangeably here to cover all visitors to protected areas.

² World Travel & Tourism Council. (2013) *Economic Impact of Travel & Tourism 2013 Annual Update: Summary*.

http://www.wttc.org/site_media/uploads/downloads/Economic_Impact_of_TT_2013_Annual_Update_-_Summary.pdf. Accessed October 2013.

³ Bushell, R. & Eagles, P. (eds) (2007). *Tourism and Protected Areas: Benefits Beyond Boundaries*. CAB International, UK

⁴ IUCN. (2005). *Benefits Beyond Boundaries. Proceedings of the Vth IUCN World Parks Congress: WPC Recommendation 5.12*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.

⁵ CBD. (2013) *CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas*: - <http://www.cbd.int/protected/pow/learnmore/intro/>. Accessed October 2013.

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- ⁶ Dudley, N. (ed.) (2008). *Guidelines for Applying IUCN Protected Area Categories*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- ⁷ *Precautionary Principle*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precautionary_principle
- ⁸ Thomas, F. Kapoor, A., Marshall, P. (2012). *Tourism Development and behavioural changes: evidences from Ratanakiri Province, Kingdom of Cambodia*. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*. Volume 11, Issue 3, 2013.
- ⁹ Europarc Federation. (2010). *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas*. Europarc Federation, Regensburg, Germany.
- ¹⁰ Green Fins (2013). *Promoting a sustainable diving tourism industry*: <http://www.greenfins.net/>. Accessed October 2013.
- ¹¹ IUCN. (2013). *IUCN Green List of Well-Managed Protected Areas*: http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_quality/gpap_greenlist/ Accessed October 2013.
- ¹² Borrini-Feyerabend, G. et al. (2013) *Governance of Protected Areas - from understanding to action*. IUCN Gland, Switzerland.

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