



What contribution can tourism make to biodiversity conservation?

Report of a World Travel Market World Responsible Tourism Day session by the IUCN and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist (TAPAS) Group

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1. Overview

To celebrate the international year of biodiversity, IUCN and the Tourism and Protected Area Specialist Group of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas jointly organized an event on tourism and biodiversity this November during the World Travel Market's World Responsible Tourism Day in London.

Four representatives from different sectors of the tourism industry were asked to discuss and debate what has been achieved by their companies in the realm of biodiversity conservation, what challenges have been encountered and why conservation makes good business sense for them. The panelists were Matthias Leisinger from Kuoni, the leading travel organization in the world, Andrew Rettalack from &Beyond, the leader in luxury and adventure travel and safaris, Rob Moffet from Wilderness Safaris, a conservation organization and tourism company operating in Southern Africa and Barbara Powell from Marriot International, a leading worldwide hospitality company. Dr Anna Spenceley from the IUCN Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group chaired the session.

One of the highlights of the discussion was that tourism not only provides considerable financial support for conservation, but also helps to protect endangered species and vulnerable ecosystems. For instance, both &Beyond and Wilderness Safaris are responsible for protecting and conserving large areas of land in Africa and supporting the activities of conservation organizations through the collection of park fees and the payment of leases. Meanwhile, Marriott is helping to protect 1.4 million acres of the Amazon rainforest by funding a Reduced Emissions from Degradation and Deforestation (REDD) project. Kuoni on the other hand has been protecting marine resources in two of their key destinations through coral reefs monitoring activities and awareness raising campaigns.

With regards to challenges to biodiversity conservation, finances constrained doing more, particularly in the current economic climate. Another challenge pertained to the regulatory and political environment in the host country which often prevents companies from being proactive in protecting natural resources. The operators mentioned that lack of information on how to conserve areas, and the complexity of issues relating to biodiversity sometimes make it difficult to do the right thing.

Nevertheless, the tourism experts agreed that protecting biodiversity makes good business sense for the tourism industry as a whole, especially considering that this industry is so reliant on healthy ecosystems. Moreover, biodiversity-friendly practices are considered to increase brand exposure and development in key markets and to help position companies as sustainability leaders. The four panellists also agreed that such practices contribute to the longevity of their business and open doors for building new relationships with government officials, non-profit organizations and potential customers.

2. Presentations from the event

To view the event documents including the agenda, presentations and bios of the speakers, please see: http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/business/bbp_our_work/tourism/other_activities/wtm_2010/

To listen to a podcast of the event, please go to: <http://www.wtmlondon.com/page.cfm/link=653>

Planeta.com for the press release and link to the podcast: <http://planeta.wikispaces.com/wtm>

Twitter
<http://twitter.com/#!/ronmader/status/17227714385674240>

3. Further information

For more information about the IUCN and tourism, please see: http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/business/bbp_our_work/tourism/

For more information about the Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group, please see: http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/wcpa/wcpa_what/wcpa_capacity/wcpa_tourismtf/

4. Participants in the session

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