Tourism is now the world’s number one industry, and protected areas are the focus of an increasing proportion of it. It is imperative to manage tourist pressures so that visitors can appreciate protected areas without damaging what they come to see.
These Guidelines are one of the Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines series. The Series Editor is Prof. Adrian Phillips.

Other publications in the series are as follows:


*Financing Protected Areas: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers*. No. 5. Financing Protected Areas Task Force of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of IUCN, in collaboration with the Economics Unit of IUCN, 2000, viii + 58pp.


Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Guidelines for Planning and Management
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This publication has been made possible in large part by funding from Cardiff University, Environment Australia, United Nations Environment Programme, World Tourism Organization and IUCN.

Published by: IUCN, Gland, Switzerland, and Cambridge, UK, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Tourism Organization

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ISBN: 2-8317-0648-3

Cover design: IUCN Publications Services Unit

Cover photos: Front: Cheetah in Masai Mara Game Reserve, Kenya, ©Robert Bernard
Back: Ferry at Heron Island, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Australia, ©Paul F. J. Eagles; Birding in Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, Costa Rica, ©Jim Boissoneault and Banff Springs Hotel, Banff National Park, Canada, ©Paul F. J. Eagles

Layout by: IUCN Publications Services Unit

Produced by: IUCN Publications Services Unit

Printed by: Thanet Press Limited, UK

Available from: IUCN Publications Services Unit
219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 1223 277894
Fax: +44 1223 277175
E-mail: info@books.iucn.org
www: http://www.iucn.org/bookstore
A catalogue of IUCN publications is also available

The text of this book is printed on 90gsm Fineblade Extra made from low-chlorine pulp.
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Foreword by the United Nations Environment Programme

Tourism is good business, as it produces 4.4% of the world’s GDP, and employs around 200 million people globally. It can also help the sustainable management of protected areas, as a market-based alternative catering to the growing number of discriminating travellers trying to find, understand and enjoy a natural environment. Tourism can support the protection of natural resources, as local residents realise the value of their asset and want to preserve it.

At the same time, our global heritage of living species is threatened as never before, as the protected areas that harbour so much of our biodiversity are exposed to the pressures of unsustainable development. The precautionary approach urges us to be especially concerned about tourism in protected areas, given the risk of damage and destruction to this unique natural resource.

Visitor impact management is ever more important as the number of tourists increases, and their distribution is often concentrated in major tourism destinations in ecologically vulnerable areas. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been actively supporting protected area managers, working with WTO, UNESCO and IUCN, for over 12 years, through technical assistance to key stakeholders, and capacity building in projects and publications. This publication is the latest in this series, and UNEP is proud to be a partner in this milestone reference work.

Ensuring that tourism follows a truly sustainable path, and that it contributes to the sustainable management of protected areas, whether public or private, will require enhanced cooperation and concrete partnerships among the tourism industry, governments at all levels, local communities, protected area managers and planners, and the tourists themselves. This book describes how this can be done, and UNEP is happy to present it to all interested parties, especially protected area managers, on the occasion of the International Year of Ecotourism 2002.

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April 2002
Foreword by the World Tourism Organization

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) is pleased to present to the international community, and especially to public administrations and private sector businesses directly involved in tourism activities, this new publication containing guidelines for the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas.

Tourism has become a major sector of economic activity since the latter part of the twentieth century and all indications are that it will continue growing in the years to come. With this growth, a diversification of tourism products and destinations is taking place, with increased demand for nature-related tourism, including ecotourism, visitation to national and natural parks, rural-based tourism, and the like. The tourists themselves are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their demands; this is not only in terms of luxury at the various establishments they use, but especially in terms of having a meaningful travel experience, including such aspects as cultural authenticity, contacts with local communities, and learning about flora, fauna, special ecosystems and natural life in general, and its conservation.

The expected growth and the new trends observed put tourism in a strategic position to make a positive contribution to, or to negatively affect, the sustainability of natural protected areas and the development potential of surrounding areas and their communities. Tourism can in fact be a major tool for the conservation of such areas and for raising the environmental awareness of residents and visitors. These objectives can be achieved through the generation of financial resources from tourism that can be dedicated to conservation measures, and through appropriate information, interpretation and education programmes for visitors and residents. Additionally, tourism operations within protected areas need to be carefully planned, managed and monitored in order to ensure their long-term sustainability. Otherwise, negative impacts will be generated and tourism will instead contribute to the further deterioration of these areas.

WTO has been producing know-how and specific guidelines for the sustainable development and management of tourism in different types of destinations. It has also been disseminating good practices observed throughout the world, and supporting governments and the private sector with the necessary tools and technical advice to continuously raise the level of sustainability of the industry.

In presenting this publication to all types of users, WTO would like to emphasise the need for tourism managers, be they public or private, to work closely with those responsible for nature conservation and protected areas. Their joint cooperation should ensure that the twin objectives of conservation and development are suitably balanced and that tourism effectively contributes to safeguard the planet’s precious resources. This book, coming out during the International Year of Ecotourism, can be a useful instrument for achieving this goal.

World Tourism Organization
Madrid, March 2002
Acknowledgements

Special thanks must go to Jeffrey A. McNeely, James W. Thorsell and Hector Ceballos-Lascurain who prepared the first version of these Guidelines. Peter Shackleford, former Chief of Environment and Planning of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) initiated a new version of this publication and Eugenio Yunis of WTO continued his work. Helene Genot, Senior Consultant with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), encouraged a co-operative effort in the development of this new, expanded publication supported by Giulia Carbone. David Sheppard, Head of the Programme on Protected Areas of IUCN – The World Conservation Union, was a strong supporter of multi-agency co-operation in the preparation of these Guidelines.

As a result, these new Guidelines are the product of the co-operative effort of many people in UNEP, WTO and the IUCN. The funding for the project came from UNEP, WTO and Environment Australia. The authors and other content contributors came from the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of IUCN.

Thanks to the Universities of Waterloo and Montana, which supported Dr Eagles and Dr McCool respectively in this work, and to the Department of Conservation and Land Management in Western Australia which similarly supported Mr Haynes.

A special debt is owed to Pam Wight, a tourism consultant, who undertook a full review of a draft of the Guidelines. She provided thorough and very helpful editorial changes and comments, and substantial additional material. Her suggested revisions and document reorganisation were very influential in the final version, and the result was much improved through her contribution.

In addition, Dick Stanley of the Department of Canadian Heritage, Ross Constable of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service in Australia, Lee Thomas of Environment Australia and Derek Wade of Parks Canada contributed significantly to the economic benefits section of the Guidelines. Per Nilsen of Parks Canada provided a key section of the Guidelines dealing with risk management, and commented extensively on the chapter dealing with infrastructure and services. Rob Black of Parks Victoria provided important comments on the concession management component of the Guidelines. Oliver Hillel of UNEP provided critically important editorial advice and publication guidance.

Thanks also go to Ross Constable, a Ranger with the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, for providing assistance with the Montague Island Case Study. Richard Davies of the Northwest Parks Board of South Africa helped with the Madikwe Wildlife Reserve Case Study. Information on Chumbe Island came from Eleanor Carter in Tanzania. Chuck Hutchison of Conservation International provided current information on the Kakum National Park project in Ghana.

A number of the case studies were taken from winners of the Protected Areas category of British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Awards. This category is organised jointly
with IUCN and we applaud the airline company for this encouragement for environmentally sound tourism.

IUCN gave permission for the use of case study material originally published in the Guidelines for Tourism in Parks and Protected Areas of East Asia (Eagles et al., 2001).

Dawn Culverson and Elizabeth Halpenny, both graduate students in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, were the research and editorial assistants on the project to prepare these Guidelines. Ms Halpenny undertook a complete editorial review of a late version of the draft. Ms Culverson wrote the Human Resource section of the Guidelines. The Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo provided office and support services to the project. Catherine Eagles provided detailed comments on the copy proof version of the document.

The reproduction of the photographs used in this book was made possible by a contribution from Environment Australia. The photographers include Paul Eagles, Jim Boisssoneault and Robert Bernard. Thanks are due to the photographers for the use of their images.

The authors thank their wives and children for years of patience and assistance.
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Preface

The link between protected areas and tourism is as old as the history of protected areas. Protected areas need tourism, and tourism needs protected areas. Though the relationship is complex and sometimes adversarial, tourism is always a critical component to consider in the establishment and management of protected areas.

These guidelines aim to build an understanding of protected area tourism, and its management. They provide a theoretical structure, but are also intended to help managers in practical ways. The underlying aim is to ensure that tourism contributes to the purposes of protected areas and does not undermine them.

While protected area planners and managers can do much to build a more constructive relationship with the tourism sector, they operate within legal, political, economic and cultural contexts that greatly limit their freedom. Moreover tourism itself is driven by many forces that are beyond the influence of park managers. Therefore the success of these Guidelines depends in part on action taken by governments and others, for example in updating legislation relating to protected areas and tourism, or introducing economic incentives to encourage sustainable forms of tourism.

Nonetheless, managers can and do play a critical role. By working with a broad range of stakeholders, and notably the industry and local communities, they can do much to ensure that tourism works for their park and for the people living in it or nearby. These Guidelines contain numerous practical suggestions about how this can be done, based not only on sound theory but also on practice from around the world. In order to draw out practical advice, a number of sections are highlighted thus: Guidelines.