

BIGMUN 2024
ECOSOC 1: High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Research Report

Topic 3: Addressing the effects of the tourism industry on biodiversity.



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Introduction

The tourism industry is worth 1 trillion USD a year- supporting between 6% and 7% of the worlds workers (about 238 million) and is also responsible for 5% of the worlds GDP (5.25 trillion USD)¹. The tourism industry allows anyone to (for a certain fee) travel around the world, providing an escape route for many who feel stifled by their everyday lives or for those looking to discover other cultures and experience the world’s wonders. However, many of those who travel do not do so in an environmentally friendly way- nor do they treat the local ecosystems with sufficient respect, leaving litter lying around or introducing invasive flora or fauna to an environment not suited to deal with them. As such, the biodiversity of many countries who rely heavily on the tourism industry suffers greatly- and this has lasting consequences for the rest of humanity and the globe as a whole.

Definition of Key Terms

Ecotourism: Sustainable tourism in natural areas frequently focusing on learning about and living with nature

Sustainable tourism: Sustainable practices in and by the tourism industry

Biodiversity: The variety of living organisms and how they interact

GSTC Criteria: Global standards for sustainability in travel and tourism

Travel and Tourism Development index (TTDI): An index analysing the range of factors and policies which support the development sustainability and resilience in the Travel and Tourism industry per nation.

Background Information

The tourism industry is often seen to be damaging to the biodiversity of nations which profit from the tourism industry. This is because tourist often disrespect local ecosystems and environments- although this can sometimes be due to a lack of information on how to

¹ <https://auren.com/int/blog/tourism-facts-and-perspectives-worldwide/>

conduct themselves regarding the ecosystems of the countries they visit in a non-damaging way. This lack of care can lead to many problems, which can be grouped into 3 categories: pollution, physical impacts and depletion of natural resources. These categories can also be grouped into subdivisions: the direct impact of the tourists themselves, the impact of the tourism industry including but not limited to hotels, restaurants and event facilities and the impact of tourist travel.

Table 1 – Impacts of tourists and tourism on the visited country

	Pollution	Physical impacts	Depletion of natural resources
Direct impact of tourists	<p>Littering The littering of waste products such as plastic or food waste leads to a loss of biodiversity as it can poison organisms native to the habitat and lead to soil erosion as the quality of the soil decreases.</p> <p>Noise Pollution Not only can noise pollution cause damage to humans it can also damage animals- for example, the noise of snowmobiles has been proven to alter the natural activity pattern of animals.²</p>	<p>Trampling Tourists often walk through areas in which small plants are growing and trample these. Trampling also leads to accelerated soil erosion and increased runoff- leading to enhanced levels of eutrophication and, in areas near marine life this can lead to the bleaching of corals.</p> <p>Marine activities Many tourist activities which take place in marine environments such as scuba-diving, snorkelling or water skiing often disturb fragile ecosystems- for example coral reefs.</p>	<p>Resources Tourism often places a high demand on the local industry- especially in areas in which tourism is seasonal and during the high seasons a high concentration of tourists gather in one area- making it difficult for the local industry to meet the demands of the tourists.</p>
Tourism industry	<p>Sewage Sewage and food waste produced by tourists is often placed in landfills or other areas which disrupt local environments.</p> <p>Aesthetic pollution</p>	<p>Deforestation Forests are often cut down to make space for more developments, leading to habitat loss and ecosystem destruction.</p> <p>Infrastructure</p>	<p>Water consumption Not only tourists require water, but the tourist industry does. For instance, Utah spends 38 million gallons a day on golf courses⁴- enough to fill 5 Olympic</p>

² <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/st-about.html>

⁴ <https://www.deseret.com/2022/3/22/22988989/an-illogical-oasis-golf-course-water-usage-st-george-golf>

	<p>The tourism industry often fails to construct buildings which integrate themselves into their local environments, disturbing local wildlife.</p>	<p>development Land must often be cleared to make space for tourism facilities which leads to habitat destruction.</p> <p>Marina development Marinas (similar to docks) involve walls which stop waves from entering the bay. This leads to a change in wave patterns which can alter marine habitats leading, for example, to the destruction of coral reefs³.</p>	<p>swimming pools.</p>
<p>Tourism transport</p>	<p>Air pollution Many tourism industries use fossil fuels to power their vehicles, leading to greenhouse gas emissions and increased global warming.</p> <p>Noise pollution Tourists often view animal in loud vehicles- leading to near constant sounds which disturb wildlife. In terrestrial ecosystems increased sound levels have been found to lead to an increase in stress hormones which can lead to lower body health and a lower chance of successful reproduction.</p>	<p>Infrastructure development Infrastructure such as airports, railway station and railway tracks all require space. This space often comes from habitat destruction.</p>	<p>Unsustainable travel Many tourists use unsustainable transports such as aeroplanes, cars of cruise liners. These release CO₂ and (in the case of cruise liners) sewage.</p>

However, tourism can also have positive effects. Many tourists visit an area for its biodiversity and local ecosystems, and the funds obtained from the tourism industry are sometimes invested in wildlife programmes or charities. Although in some cases – such as the great barrier reef- despite the habitat destruction the tourists are not overwhelmingly perturbed as many visitors had difficulty distinguishing healthy coral from dead coral⁵.

³ https://www.coral.org/files/pdf/resources/marine_guide_english.pdf

⁵ <https://books.google.de/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gpRqDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA437&dq=tourism+and+biodiversity+loss&ots=2t-xHOzbO-&sig=MbG7qAeWCCGudt3Mpik51LHT0->

However, many organisations are working to solve the negative effects of tourism on biodiversity, even the tourism industry itself, with initiatives such as sustainable tourism and ecotourism which focus on learning about and preserving nature.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)⁶: A programme helping the UN and its member states handle climate change and conserve the environment.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)⁷: The council which sets and manages the Global Standards for sustainable travel and tourism- also known as the GSTC criteria.

United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)⁸: A UN organisation based in Spain which fosters “responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism”⁹.

Convention on biological diversity (CBD)¹⁰: An agreement created in 1992 and actualised in 1993 focusing on 3 main goals: “the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity; the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources”¹¹.

The Sustainable Tourism Gateway¹²: An internet tool set up by the Global Development Research Centre (GDRC) in 2008 to provide easy access to information about sustainable tourism and related topics.

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)¹³: Formed in the late 1980s its mission is to make the travel and tourism industry more sustainable.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)¹⁴: A global society which fosters ecotourism and sustainable travel.

[s#v=onpage&q=tourism%20and%20biodiversity%20loss&f=false](#)

⁶ <https://www.unep.org/>

⁷ <https://www.gstcouncil.org/>

⁸ <https://www.unwto.org/>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Tourism_Organization#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20World%20Tourism,is%20headquartered%20in%20Madrid%2C%20Spain.

¹⁰ <https://www.cbd.int/>

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/ldcportal/content/convention-biological-diversity-and-its-protocols#:~:text=The%20Convention%20on%20Biological%20Diversity,the%20utilization%20of%20genetic%20resources.>

¹² <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/st-about.html>

¹³ <https://wtcc.org/>

¹⁴ <https://ecotourism.org/>

Relevant UN Resolutions

UNGA sustainable Tourism resolutions

Resolution _A_RES_77_178¹⁵

Promotion of sustainable and resilient tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environmental protection

“8. Also emphasizes that sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, can contribute to sustainable development, in particular to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources, and can improve the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women and young people, and can create significant opportunities for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the protection of natural areas by encouraging Indigenous Peoples and local communities in host countries and tourists alike to preserve and respect the natural and cultural heritage.”

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Aichi Biodiversity Targets

Declarations for global biodiversity protection established in 2010 for 2020. By 2020 none of them had been achieved due, in part, to the unclear nature of their targets.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)

A framework created in 2021 and adopted in 2022 to succeed the Aichi Biodiversity targets- this framework should lead to nation states having achieved the biodiversity goals by 2030.

Possible Solutions

One viewpoint could be that there is not enough awareness of the tourism industries impact on biological diversity, meaning that more people should be educated about its impacts and the information should be readily available.

Another viewpoint could be that sustainable and alternative forms of travel are not encouraged enough- meaning that if there were more media portrayals of them, unsustainable options would be less common.

A third viewpoint could be that charities which support biodiversity and encourage sustainable and eco-friendly tourism are not supported enough and therefore not as prevalent. Supporting and partnering with these organisations could lead to an upswing in biodiversity as awareness could be generated and programmes implemented.

¹⁵ https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-01/Resolution_A_RES_77_178_ENG.pdf?VersionId=jfpCQCnhCVjH1bgRlSHnxYi.ClSVFmKe

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[HTTPS://AUREN.COM/INT/BLOG/TOURISM-FACTS-AND-PERSPECTIVES-WORLDWIDE/](https://auren.com/int/blog/tourism-facts-and-perspectives-worldwide/)

THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM GATEWAY

[HTTPS://WWW.GDRC.ORG/UEM/ECO-TOUR/ST-ABOUT.HTML](https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/st-about.html)

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE, MANAGING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS IN THE MARINE RECREATION CENTRE

[HTTPS://WWW.CORAL.ORG/FILES/PDF/RESOURCES/MARINE_GUIDE_ENGLISH.PDF](https://www.coral.org/files/pdf/resources/marine_guide_english.pdf)

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UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

[HTTPS://WWW.UNEP.ORG/](https://www.unep.org/)

GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY COUNCIL

[HTTPS://WWW.GSTCOUNCIL.ORG/](https://www.gstcouncil.org/)

UNITED NATIONS WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION

[HTTPS://WWW.UNWTO.ORG/](https://www.unwto.org/)

WIKIPEDIA, WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION

[HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/WORLD_TOURISM_ORGANIZATION](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Tourism_Organization)

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

[HTTPS://WWW.CBD.INT/](https://www.cbd.int/)

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY GOALS

[HTTPS://WWW.UN.ORG/LDCPORTAL/CONTENT/CONVENTION-BIOLOGICAL-DIVERSITY-AND-ITS-](https://www.un.org/lcdportal/content/convention-biological-diversity-and-its-protocols#:~:text=the%20convention%20on%20biological%20diversity,the%20utilization%20of%20genetic%20resources.)

[PROTOCOLS#:~:TEXT=THE%20CONVENTION%20ON%20BIOLOGICAL%20DIVERSITY,THE%20UTILIZATION%20OF%20GENETIC%20RESOURCES.](https://www.un.org/lcdportal/content/convention-biological-diversity-and-its-protocols#:~:text=the%20convention%20on%20biological%20diversity,the%20utilization%20of%20genetic%20resources.)

THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM GATEWAY

[HTTPS://WWW.GDRC.ORG/UEM/ECO-TOUR/ST-ABOUT.HTML](https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/st-about.html)

WORLD TRAVEL AND TOURISM COUNCIL

[HTTPS://WTTC.ORG/](https://wttc.org/)

THE INTERNATIONAL ECOTOURISM SOCIETY

[HTTPS://ECOTOURISM.ORG/](https://ecotourism.org/)

UNGA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM RESOLUTIONS, RESOLUTION A_RES_77_178

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