

FORUM: United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

QUESTION OF: Discussing the promotion of ecotourism as a tool for biodiversity conservation

SUBMITTED BY: The Russian Federation

CO-SUBMITTED BY: Australia, Costa Rica, Hungary, Indonesia, Jordan, Malta, Mozambique, The Netherlands

THE WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION,

Acknowledging the financial support that ecotourism has to offer for reinvesting into conservation projects and funding the maintenance of protected areas, reducing dependence on external funding,

Recognizing that ecotourism creates economic incentives for preserving natural areas and local governments and communities are motivated to protect marine and terrestrial ecosystems,

Keeping in mind that ecotourism fosters environmental awareness by educating visitors about biodiversity and conservation challenges leading tourists to support conservation efforts,

1. Encourages Member States to collaborate for the development of ecotourism initiatives to conserve biodiversity, in order to:
 - a) protect specific natural habitats that have potential for ecotourism, which will be determined based on:
 - i. the area's level of biodiversity and ecological significance,
 - ii. the level of interest and attraction the area receives from tourists and local residents,
 - iii. the criteria and measures outlined in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD),
 - b) raise awareness about how ecotourism can be integrated into the conservation of biodiversity by:
 - i. informing tourism companies about the implementation of ecotourism, focusing on the benefits of it for biodiversity and the environment,
 - ii. organizing workshops for local communities and tourism professionals to inform them about sustainable tourism and how it can impact the ecosystem,

- c) fund conservation programs by allocating a percentage of ecotourism income to support biodiversity conservation projects, such as but not limited to:
 - i. species preservation,
 - ii. habitat restoration,
 - iii. anti-poaching measures;
2. Recommends collaborating with worldwide tourism companies in order to create and maintain projects that support and conserve biodiversity, in order to:
- a) raise awareness about species that live in the area and which are endangered due to over-hunting and habitat degradation, focusing on:
 - i. encouraging reforestation projects to rebuild critical habitats,
 - ii. researching possible conservation projects to protect endemic species,
 - b) support sustainable development by balancing the tourism initiatives in the area with ecosystem preservation,
 - c) encourage sustainable economic opportunities for local communities, which will make the community embrace the importance of the ecosystem around them,
 - d) raise global awareness about the unique biodiversity of the region, and help create an understanding of the importance of the area's conservation;
3. Further recommends that a portion of income from ecotourism is directed to the Government of the Member State where the ecotourism region is located in, in order to persuade the Governments to contribute more in the development of ecotourism, in which the portion of the ecotourism income will be determined based on:
- a) the level of effort that the State has invested in the project, including financial, logistical, and infrastructural contributions,
 - b) the amount of resources that the State has provided for the ecotourism project,
 - c) the State's involvement in ensuring the sustainability and conservation of the area's biodiversity, where the state will be able to use the income for:
 - i. further developing the ecotourism area's infrastructure and logistical features,
 - ii. creating new possible projects that can support the biodiversity of a new environment in the country,
 - iii. some areas other than ecotourism determined by the UN, which would help the promotion of ecotourism in some countries;

4. Proposes involving local communities in ecotourism projects by creating a Regional Council for Ecotourism Projects (RCEP) for each ecotourism project, which will focus on:
 - a) providing employment opportunities for locals of the area in tourism sectors such as tour guiding, hospitality services, cultural performances,
 - b) ensuring that local communities participate in decision-making processes related to the ecosystem surrounding them, particularly regarding land use, which will be done by:
 - i. a number of representatives gathering in the council to present the ideas of the local community, so that they remain the main actors in the success of the ecotourism projects and also benefit from them,
 - ii. the decision taken by the council being directed to the UN in order to take the local community's ideas into action,
 - c) offering vocational training programs for local communities to manage and promote sustainable ecotourism practices,
 - d) creating a UN endorsed Green Accreditation to recognize local-owned hotels and lodges that meet high standards of sustainability and biodiversity protection, which would:
 - i. promote the local-owned businesses rather than big corporations since the local hotels that are recognized would be a new tourist attraction,
 - ii. encourage businesses to develop sustainable practices, therefore making the idea of ecological sustainability a part of the accommodation services as well;
5. Further proposes the creation of a Sustainable Tourism Regulations (STR) for all tourists participating in ecotourism activities in order to minimize the negative environmental effect, where the contents of the STR will include:
 - a) behavioral expectations from tourists, such as but not limited to:
 - i. respecting the local community's lifestyle,
 - ii. refraining from disturbing wildlife, such as avoiding feeding or approaching animals in their natural habitats, unless being given permission to do so,
 - iii. supporting local economies by preferring local-owned businesses for accommodation, catering, and shopping,
 - b) environmental responsibility recommendations, which will:

- i. encourage tourists to use eco-friendly transportation,
 - ii. educate tourists on the biodiversity of the area and how their actions can contribute to its preservation,
 - iii. include participating in conservation-related activities such as tree planting,
 - c) the clear explanation of the STR guidelines before the start of the tour by the tour operators, making sure that everyone is aware of the guidelines they need to follow;
6. Requests for the creation of an ecological impact report which will be annually conducted in the ecotourism areas to assess the effects of ecotourism in the region, which will be:
 - a) determined according to the specific needs of the area, including:
 - i. biodiversity,
 - ii. local ecosystems,
 - iii. capacity for sustainable tourism development,
 - b) shared on public platforms and official websites for worldwide recognition and transparency, ensuring that findings are accessible to local and global communities,
 - c) used as a basis for creating or revising ecotourism guidelines and regulations, ensuring continuous improvement in sustainable tourism practices, and minimizing negative environmental impact,
 - d) regularly updated and reviewed for changes in the region's ecological status, ensuring that ecotourism activities remain aligned with conservation goals,
 - e) used to determine the future of the project, and will result in the project being canceled or paused if negative effects are detected;
7. Calls for travel agencies and organizations involved in ecotourism to consider the health standards set by the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Health Regulations (IHR) while creating their proposed travel routes, considering the following topics:
 - a) the possible diseases present in the areas,
 - b) the need for pre-travel health assessments for tourists to ensure they are vaccinated and prepared for potential health risks in the region,
 - c) the implementation of health protocols and emergency response plans in case of disease outbreaks or health emergencies in ecotourism areas,

- d) the provision of adequate healthcare facilities or access to medical assistance in ecotourism destinations, particularly in remote or underserved regions,
 - e) the promotion of health education for tourists, including information on:
 - i. hygiene,
 - ii. disease prevention,
 - iii. maintaining personal health during ecotourism activities,
 - f) the coordination with local health authorities to ensure that the public health needs of both tourists and the local population are addressed comprehensively;
8. Urges the cooperation with local and global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which the UN will select to ensure the success and minimal negative environmental effect of ecotourism, where the NGOs will come into play:
- a) the decision making process about the travel routes and destinations, using data about:
 - i. the ecological biodiversity of the areas,
 - ii. the local community's views on ecotourism and how their reaction would be towards possible ecotourism activities in their region,
 - b) monitoring the health risks in the selected areas, therefore informing the travel agencies and ecotourism participants about the possible areas to avoid,
 - c) navigating the tourism initiatives in the areas,
 - d) providing first-aid for participants who get physically harmed in the ecotourism area, and helping them access the needed healthcare if the injury is severe;
9. Advocates for lowering taxes and providing incentives by the UN to ecotourism businesses and programs in order to:
- a) allow ecotourism businesses lower their prices which would number of people taking part in the projects,
 - b) attract a wider audience while making them a more accessible option,
 - c) ensure that ecotourism businesses will be able to afford costs such as marketing which will:
 - i. inform people about the benefits of ecotourism,
 - ii. attract more tourists, giving these businesses a higher revenue to expand,

- d) assure customers that ecotourism businesses will now have enough income to fund accommodation for people with disabilities so as for everyone to have access to participating in these trips,
 - e) create job opportunities as businesses will be able to expand, contributing to the local economies;
10. Further suggests establishing a global conservation fund, supported by a small fee on accommodations in popular tourist areas of which a percentage of the money will go to indigenous communities, and the rest to ecotourism projects, in order to:
- a) finance local conservation projects, which will underline the importance of the environment, while ensuring the original biodiversity of the area is preserved,
 - b) support and enable indigenous communities to protect their natural resources,
 - c) further benefit ecotourism businesses and letting them expand, which will:
 - i. create more job opportunities, that will help strengthen the economy of the area,
 - ii. encourage the creation of more ecotourism projects.