



Photo credit: Flickr – Mr. Nixter

Ocean Tourism

What is the issue?

Humans have many cultural connections to the ocean – for tourism, sport, relaxation, cultural and spiritual traditions. **Oceans and coasts are at the heart of tourism, as approximately 80% of all tourism takes place in coastal areas** and 183 countries have coastlines. The ocean tourism or **blue tourism** sector has numerous segments, from mass coastal tourism and the cruise industry to **ecotourism**, recreational fishing, scuba diving and snorkelling, viewing of sharks and marine mammals and other marine ecosystem focused travel. Each has different impacts.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, coastal (beach-based) and maritime (water-based) tourism was the **second largest employer in the entire ocean economy**, providing one in eleven jobs worldwide.

For some tourist destinations, especially in developing countries and in particular in small island developing states (SIDS), coastal and marine tourism can be a significant source of jobs, livelihoods and economic growth, sometimes comprising up to a **quarter of national GDP**.

However, the success of ocean tourism depends on **preserving the very nature and biodiversity** that are at **risk of depletion** from ocean tourism itself. The success of ocean tourism also depends on ensuring that communities and workers in the sector are empowered. To date, far more attention has been devoted to the environmental impacts of tourism than to the social and human rights impacts of the sector. Issues like land-grabbing, the exclusion of local populations from revenues, the distortion of local economies and the disruption of sacred cultures and traditions are all adverse impacts driven by the structures of ocean tourism.

The task is to find a balance between the opportunities for sustainable development which ocean tourism brings and the risks of **human rights concerns**, the **commodification of nature**, and environmental impacts. This means addressing **trade-offs** between environmental and socio-economic objectives, as well as concerns about the long-term **costs to**

ABOUT THE OCEAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS PLATFORM

Led by the **Institute for Human Rights and Business** and the **Rafto Foundation**, the Ocean and Human Rights Platform is a collaborative movement to raise awareness to prevent and address adverse human rights impacts across the ocean's industries. The Ocean Platform works with a global network of business, government, human rights defenders, civil society partners, academia and national human rights institutions.

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CASE STUDY

Three of the largest cruise companies, Carnival Corporation, Royal Caribbean International and a have lobbied to be exempt from several regulatory requirements in the US with respect to workers' rights. This **means that foreign workers on board cruise ships have fewer protections**, insufficient access to healthcare, and can be subject to poor living and working conditions.

SIDS in particular and human rights concerns more specifically. The pristine environments that attract ecotourism cannot sustain the far heavier traffic of mass tourism attracted to the world's coasts; but the ethos and approach of ecotourism can inform the broader tourism sector in its path towards greater inclusivity and sustainability.

Whose human rights are impacted?

Tourism directly and indirectly provides much needed jobs and sources of income especially in developing countries and in particular in SIDS with few other sources of income. There are however, a whole range of potential adverse human rights impacts linked to in the sector that need to be addressed as part of any approach to sustainable and inclusive tourism, including the issues below.

Local communities and indigenous peoples

- The uneven development that has often resulted from tourism has tended to build on and reinforce existing inequalities. For example, marginalised groups are not able to compete with more powerful people in securing resources and offering services to tourists.
- An increasing dependency on tourism can hinder the development of other sectors and other avenues of earning livelihoods. Tourism can also increase competition for land and resources where travel agencies, as well as multinational cruise and hotel operators have the economic advantage.
- Livelihoods are undermined through the expropriation of land and resources. Forced displacement from “land grabbing” and “ocean grabbing” results in a loss of housing along with the degradation of the natural environment which restricts access to water and food. indigenous peoples face grave threats of loss of land and territory which affects their cultures, identities, and traditional ownership of land and resources.
- Although tourism can be a way of keeping certain traditions alive through support to cultural activities, it can also result in appropriation, homogenisation and undermining of local culture and cultural heritage sites.

Workers

- The predominance of on-call, casual, temporary, seasonal and part-time employment in the tourism sector creates job insecurity, low wages, excessively long working hours, health and safety concerns, lack of contracts, and lack of social protection (see for example in the cruise industry).
- Poor working conditions also increase the risk of forced labour, particularly through the payment of recruitment fees. Migrant workers are disproportionately employed in lower paid roles, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation.
- Gender-based discrimination is most pronounced in the informal working arrangements in the tourism sector. Sexual exploitation and assault onboard cruise ships happens in greater frequency than any other major offenses on-board ships.
- Child labour can often be found in the supply chains of tourist facilities and in informal services.

🔊 CASE STUDY

GreenFins is a sustainable snorkelling and diving initiative in South and Southeast Asia. It “provides guidance based on solid coral reef and diving industry know-how,” by helping small and medium-sized businesses show conservation leadership and turn environmental risks into opportunity. The initiative seeks to protect marine ecosystems while creating long-term livelihoods.



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Which businesses should pay attention?

The tourism value chain is complex, and there are often many products and services associated with tourism operations. The destination end of the value chain and in particular the international hospitality sector have most often been in the spotlight, but there are many other actors involved. These include shipping companies & cruise operators, airlines, tour/excursion operations, hotels and other accommodation, construction firms, food and beverage suppliers, service providers and logistics.

Although the types of human rights impacts differ across these actors, the rights impacts are all inter-linked. While every business should aim to conduct robust human rights due diligence across its practices, larger enterprises with market power and leverage should pay greater attention to the impacts of their own operations as well as those of their contractors and sub-contractors.

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What should businesses do?

In addition to their responsibilities under the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), businesses should undertake the following:

Planning Stage

- Participate in Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and [sustainable tourism management strategies](#) that advance environmental and social priorities in tourism.
- Engage with and encourage government stakeholders to ensure meaningful consultation with local communities occurs throughout the planning process, including affected indigenous communities providing their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).
- Ensure that impact assessments include social and human rights impacts. In addition to environmental impact assessments, [human rights impact assessments \(HRIA\)](#) are a similarly structured approach and are increasingly used in the [marine sector](#) and the [tourism sector](#).

Construction

- Acquire or lease land responsibly, paying particular attention in countries where there may be [indigenous peoples](#) and local communities whose customary land rights are not recognised in national law.
- Construct responsibly, eliminating impacts on the marine environment and with appropriate adaptation to climate change.
- Ensure respect for labour rights and occupational health and safety for the whole work force including labour rights of contractors and sub-contractors, especially during the construction phase.

Sourcing

- Adopt responsible sourcing policies and practices to build sustainable and inclusive supply chains that support development of local services, building long term sustainable relationships which reinforces linkages between local production and tourism

FINANCE

Trends in commercial financing:

UNEP FI's programme on Sustainable Blue Finance conducted a [survey](#) in September 2020 which showed that coastal and marine tourism financing is dominated by institutions based in Europe. The survey further highlighted that tourism is financed predominantly through shares, working capital loans and corporate financing.

Development financing: A few of the Development Finance Institutions have a specific focus on tourism. For example the Inter-American Development Bank has a [tourism sector strategy](#) and the [World Bank](#) and IFC are active in the marine tourism sector, including in supporting [SIDs](#) in creating tourism strategies.

Blended finance: Public sector funding or philanthropy can help [mobilise and re-orient private finance towards a sustainable ocean economy](#), including by accelerating financial incentives for nature-based tourism infrastructure, combining [tourism with conservation of marine protected areas \(MPAs\)](#) and supporting the many SMEs in the sector to support ocean conservation and MPAs locally, including as part of [privately protected areas](#).

Operating

- Ensure that labour rights are upheld across the workforce including contracting and temporary workforces. For the shipping and cruise sector, this means complying with ILO's [Maritime Labour Convention](#) and other maritime conventions, while also respecting broader human rights as set out in the [Code of Conduct on Seafarer's Rights](#).
- Employ and train inclusive workforces. As tourism can be one of the few areas of employment and opportunities for locals, use the opportunity to support careers for [women](#), youth, persons with disabilities and disadvantaged groups.
- Make the equitable [sharing of benefits](#) a key part of operations to increase the [reinvestment](#) of tourism revenue into local communities to empower individuals, build skills and diversify economic opportunities.
- Demonstrate an integrated approach to environment and human rights, such as by investing in sewerage, wastewater and water infrastructure for marine tourism to improve the health of coastal communities and mitigate adverse environmental impacts.

RESOURCES: Some useful existing work/initiatives

- [Roundtable on Human Rights in Tourism](#)
- [Tourism Action Coalition for a Sustainable Ocean](#)
- [Sustainable Hospitality Alliance](#) – has a work programme on human rights and youth employment
- [World Indigenous Tourism Alliance](#)

RESOURCES: International standards & guidance

Business and Human Rights

- [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (2011)
- [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) (2011)

SDGs

- UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) – [Tourism for the SDGs](#)

International Standards

- UNWTO [Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#) (2019) and the associated [private sector commitments](#) to the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism
- ILO [Maritime Labour Convention](#) (2006)

Guidance

- ILO, [Guidelines on decent work and socially responsible tourism](#) (2017)
- UN WTO [Alula Framework For Inclusive Community Development Through Tourism](#) (2020)
- Sustainable Hospitality Alliance – [Know How Guide: Human Rights and the Hotel Industry](#)
- World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), [Inclusive & Accessible Travel Guidelines](#) (2021)
- [Indigenous People and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practice Guidelines](#) (2017)
- [Global Sustainable Tourism Council \(GSTC\) Recognised Standards](#)
- [IUCN Guides on Sustainable Tourism](#)
- UNEP FI's [Turning the Tide, Annex of indicators and Recommended Exclusions List](#)
- TwentyFifty, [Human Rights Assessments in the Tourism Sector: A data collection guide for practitioners](#) (2015)