



*for a living planet*

# WWF-UK Policy Position Statement on *Travel for Tourism*

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November 2007  
Updated January 2010*

Revision Date: *January 2012*  
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# WWF-UK Policy Position Statement on Travel for Tourism

## PURPOSE

This paper clarifies the WWF-UK position in relation to Travel for Tourism of UK tourists both within Great Britain and overseas. It examines two key issues:

1. Tourist travel to the destination
2. Tourist travel and impacts at the destination.

The focus of this paper is travel for tourism. Although “tourism” as a specific topic is covered, issues such as accommodation, food and the way tourists interact with local communities is not explored in detail. WWF International has position papers on “tourism”<sup>1</sup> which cover this issue in greater depth. Business travel is covered in a separate position statement.

## SUMMARY OF WWF-UK’S POSITION

The mission of WWF is to stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature by:

- conserving the world’s biodiversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable sources is sustainable
- reducing pollution and wasteful consumption.

The way we travel to and within a tourist destination is an important issue for WWF-UK. Tourism is the largest economic sector in the world – employing more than 250 million people. This sector can have positive and negative environmental, cultural, economic and social impacts. Tourism that doesn’t involve local communities and pays little regard to local environments can have a significant negative impact on some of the most biologically diverse and fragile areas, including many of WWF’s priority areas (ecoregions).

### *Travel to destination*

One of WWF’s key goals is to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions associated with travel to tourist destinations. Travel, particularly for leisure purposes, is one of the fastest growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions. The most significant of these gases is carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). However, aviation has other impacts on climate change, too – emissions of nitrogen oxides and water vapour at high altitudes also have a powerful warming effect. There is still some uncertainty over the precise scale of these impacts, but scientists currently put the total warming impact of aviation at two to four times greater than the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions alone.

Climate change is the biggest threat facing the world today. Many of our most vulnerable habitats and species, as well as human populations, are at risk, with the most vulnerable and least able to adapt to change coming from the world’s poorest countries. We need to reduce emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases at

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism Position Statement ( WWF, 2001)

source, through behaviour and systems change, to bring about a reduction in travel and a shift to more sustainable modes of transport.

#### *Destination impacts*

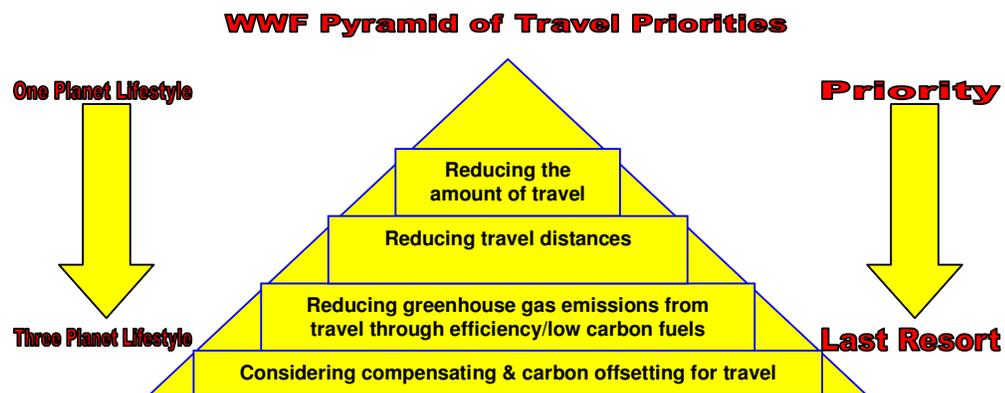
Responsible tourism can play a key role in contributing to our overall mission while eliminating many negative impacts often associated with tourism.<sup>2</sup> People's choices, behaviour and interactions at a holiday destination, particularly with regard to travel, can have a major impact on local environments and cultures.

#### *WWF-UK travel priorities*

WWF-UK takes a hierarchical approach to travel. We work to reduce the amount of travel in the first instance and then look at how we can reduce overall travel distances. Reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and other greenhouse gases associated with travel (through fuel consumption efficiency improvements or low carbon fuel sources, for example) then follows. The consideration of offsetting emissions from travel is seen as a last resort after all other options have been thoroughly explored.

Our hierarchy of priorities are therefore:

- a) Reducing the *need* to travel;
- b) reducing travel distances;
- c) reducing emissions from travel through efficiency/low carbon fuels; and
- d) considering carbon offsetting for travel.



Guided by these priorities, our position on travel for tourism is summarised as follows:

- 1) ***WWF-UK encourages people to consider travelling to holiday destinations which are closer to home, including those in Great Britain and continental Europe, where people can use the train rather than the plane. We encourage tourism which involves taking fewer flights and longer breaks as opposed to flights for numerous short haul breaks.***

This position is based on the following:

- WWF-UK is working towards the goal of a One Planet Future – where people and nature thrive within their fair share of the Earth's resources. One of our key strategic goals is to reduce the current UK 3.1 planet lifestyle to that within the limits of One Planet. Transport is one of the biggest components of people's

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<sup>2</sup> Responsible tourism is defined as tourism that satisfies tourists, maintains or enhances the destination environment, and benefits the destination's residents.

ecological footprint (a measure of our global impact). Reducing our overall impacts of travel on the climate can only be achieved by changing our behaviour, our “patterns of consumption”, in two ways: by switching to more ecologically benign forms of travel (mainly those which produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions), and by travelling less. The primary determinant of which option is most appropriate is an assessment of the *need* to travel.

- Aviation contributes around 7% of the UK’s total greenhouse gas emissions, though with the additional warming effect of emissions and water vapour released at altitude, the actual figure is likely to be more in the region of 13%.
- The further you travel, the more CO<sub>2</sub><sup>3</sup> is released as a result.
- During the last 10 years the trend has been to take shorter and more frequent flights to destinations overseas, either for holidays or shorter breaks. This has contributed to the rapid and continual rise in transport greenhouse gas emissions. Taking fewer and longer holidays, particularly those involving air travel, can make a significant impact in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including CO<sub>2</sub>.
- Holidays in the UK and Europe, where the destination can be reached by rail, are the environmentally soundest options.

**2) WWF-UK encourages the use of tourism transport methods which reduce our greenhouse gas emissions .This includes a preference for using the train/bus rather than the plane, and the train/bus in preference to the car due to lower per passenger emissions associated with these modes of transport.**

This position is based on the following:

- WWF-UK believes that by 2050, global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by at least 80% from 1990 levels to prevent the rise in global temperatures from exceeding 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This will require global greenhouse gas concentrations to stabilise as far below 450 parts per million CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e)<sup>4</sup> as possible, and preferably at or below 400ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e.<sup>5</sup>
- The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research concludes that without swift action to curtail aviation growth, all the other UK sectors will have to completely decarbonise by 2050 to compensate.<sup>6</sup>
- On average, passenger rail currently emits approximately half the CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger kilometre of cars and a quarter of domestic air. Moreover, while there is at least the prospect of developing low or zero-carbon fuels for surface transport modes in the medium term, there is little prospect of such advances in the aviation sector. Indeed, ambitious fuel efficiency improvements for aircraft are already incorporated in the emission forecasts for the sector. According to the Committee on Climate Change, sustainably sourced biofuel could cover at most 30% of flights by 2050, and a more realistic scenario would be 10%.<sup>7</sup>
- As all forms of transport, except self-propelled modes, have an inherent emissions impact, the further you travel the more you contribute to climate change. It therefore stands to reason that travel by air, where the distances covered are in the thousands of miles, seriously contributes to climate change.
- Aircraft release CO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants high in the atmosphere where they have an even stronger greenhouse effect – a process known as radiative forcing. That is

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<sup>3</sup> The standard assessment is based on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per passenger km .

<sup>4</sup> A CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (or CO<sub>2</sub>e) is a metric measure used to compare the emissions from various greenhouse gases, such as nitrous oxides, based upon their global warming potential. Carbon dioxide equivalents are commonly expressed as million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents.

<sup>5</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Contraction & Convergence: UK carbon emissions and the implications for UK air traffic (Tyndall Centre 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Committee on Climate Change, 2009, ‘Meeting the UK Aviation target’.

why aircraft emissions are thought to be between 2 and 4 times more damaging than their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions alone.

- Road transport currently accounts for around 20% of the UK's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In terms of greenhouse gas emissions, using the bus is a better option than a car for comparable journeys. Buses cannot, however, entirely avoid responsibility for the sector's carbon emissions. Modern fleets are looking at electric and/or biofuel alternatives.
- A full train is at least twice as energy-efficient as a full car and therefore less polluting. Trains are therefore more preferable to the driver-only occupancy of so many car journeys, particularly on longer distances when the fuel efficiency per passenger mile really begins to tell.

**3) WWF-UK does not support the use of flights within mainland UK or to the near continent (France, Belgium, the Netherlands) for travel tourism purposes.**

This position is based on the following:

- Other options, including a comprehensive rail and coach network, provide adequate alternatives which will help cut greenhouse gas emissions. All these destinations can be reached using these networks in a relatively short time. Here are a few examples of return journeys based on air and rail in relation to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per passenger:<sup>8 9</sup>

Journey	Air	Train
London to Paris (346km)	3.5hrs, 122kg/CO <sub>2</sub>	3.0 hours, 12kg/CO <sub>2</sub>
London to Edinburgh (531km)	3.5hrs, 193kg/CO <sub>2</sub>	4.5hrs, 25kg/CO <sub>2</sub>

- 45% of air journeys in Europe are less than 500km – about the distance from London to the Scottish border<sup>10</sup>. These journeys are to destinations within easy reach by train and bus, in similar time frames.
- Short haul flights are disproportionately polluting because most of the fuel is used to reach cruising height. This is followed almost immediately by a descent. Short haul flights have a higher intensity of fuel burn per kilometre travelled.

**4) WWF-UK recognises that international tourism can, where appropriately managed and monitored, play an important role in poverty alleviation, cultural understanding and biodiversity conservation.**

This position is based on the following:

- Tourism plays an important role in poverty alleviation, particularly in the developing world. Tourism is significant and growing in many poorer countries and is the largest generator of income for a third of developing countries. Research by the Overseas Development Institute<sup>11</sup> shows that the poor within these developing countries can receive from 10-27% of income spent by tourists within the country – far more than has been previously assumed. This variability also demonstrates that

<sup>8</sup>Times are from door to door and include check-in times. Costs of return flights (as at 23 July 2007) to Paris, Edinburgh and Nice respectively are £50, £74 and £105. Equivalent return train journeys are £154, £97 and £170.

<sup>9</sup>There can be considerable differences in the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> produced for specific journeys, depending on the source of information. Carbon calculators also show considerable differences. The figures here are based on the "average" taken from a basket of calculators and should therefore be treated as an approximation. They are indicative only.

<sup>10</sup> UK Department for Transport calculations.

<sup>11</sup> The data can be found at [www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706\\_tourism\\_vca.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706_tourism_vca.pdf) and [http://www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706\\_tourism\\_ptp.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706_tourism_ptp.pdf)

it has the potential, when appropriately managed and operated, to contribute more significantly to poverty reduction.

- Tourism plays a very important and often vital role in biodiversity schemes across the globe, including conservation projects directly managed or indirectly supported by WWF. Where tourism is compatible with and part of international, national, regional and local sustainable development plans that protect and enhance biodiversity while directly benefiting local communities, there are obvious benefits.
- Tourism can help promote cultural understanding and respect while raising awareness of another culture/environment. There is therefore the potential of engendering greater understanding of the natural world and the local/global threats that confront it.

**5) *WWF-UK supports and promotes projects which encourage responsible tourism, as defined by WWF International.***

This position is based on the following:

- Responsible tourism is defined as tourism that satisfies tourists, maintains or enhances the destination environment, and benefits the destination's residents. WWF believes that the term "sustainable tourism", often used within the tourist industry, is at present an unachievable ideal, not least because of the significant contribution that air travel makes to climate change. It is therefore more useful to think about "responsible tourism" in the context of a wider sustainable development strategy.
- The five key principles of responsible tourism are that it:
  1. should be part of a wider sustainable development framework that supports conservation of biodiversity;
  2. should use natural resources sustainably;
  3. should eliminate unsustainable consumption and minimise pollution and waste;
  4. should respect local cultures and be managed in collaboration with local people; and
  5. should be developed in ways that maximise opportunities for local people to participate and benefit.

**6) *WWF-UK supports and encourages the use of "green" travel and tourism certification schemes. Once they are established, we will evaluate, then promote and support, those schemes approved by the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council, the global accreditation body.***

This position is based on the following:

- Certification is a way of ensuring that a business, product or service meets certain standards. It awards a logo to those that, based on an audit or assessment, meet or exceed a set of specific baseline criteria. Today, certification is viewed as an important tool for distinguishing genuine ecotourism or responsible tourism companies, products or services from those that are simply using "green" language to market themselves. At the moment these are accommodation-based, but more and more programmes are being developed for other parts of the tourism industry such as parks, beaches, guides, tour operators, transport and destinations.
- Today, the Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, together with The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and Rainforest Alliance, supported by WWF, is undertaking research as part of a coalition effort to strengthen, promote and harmonise certification programmes and criteria for sustainable ecotourism and to create a global accreditation body – the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council.

**7) WWF-UK supports carbon offsetting for tourist travel only as a last resort. When offsetting carbon, WWF-UK supports “gold standard” accredited schemes. If flying to a tourist destination, WWF-UK recommends that travellers offset their emissions using one of the gold standard accredited schemes.**

This position is based on the following:

- There is a danger that offsetting will discourage individuals and businesses from reducing emissions at source. There is some concern that businesses will use offsetting as a smoke screen to ward off legislation and delay action to cut emissions, so locking the UK into high-carbon investments and social structures. The only way to tackle climate change is to pursue a low-carbon lifestyle – a key WWF priority.
- WWF recognises that there are major concerns over the plethora of offsetting projects which have been established over the last few years, and that their environmental credibility and impact on communities have been questioned. It is also difficult to show that offset schemes provide genuine additional CO<sub>2</sub> savings. The reality is that offsetting merely transfers the responsibility for tackling climate change from the North to the South.
- The gold standard is an independent, transparent, internationally recognised benchmark for “high quality” carbon offset projects. It was developed by WWF and a number of NGOs in response to concerns that many projects were not offsetting emissions to adequate standards.
- We recognise that offsetting, using gold standard accredited schemes, is better than doing nothing at all.

**8) WWF-UK supports holidays that encourage and promote sustainable travel options at destination. This includes walking, cycling and the use of public transport. WWF-UK believes that the tourist industry must incorporate sustainable travel infrastructure into resort plans in a way that also provides direct benefits and encourages their use by local people.**

This position is based on the following:

- Transport to, from and within destinations has a significant impact on the local environment and on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. New roads, regional airports, marinas and other transport infrastructure supporting the tourist industry can have a significant and detrimental effect on environmental resources, including biodiversity and local habitats. The tourism industry must incorporate sustainable transport infrastructure in resort plans as well as alternative low-impact vehicle technology. WWF accepts that improvements to tourism-related infrastructure will occur – but when they do, there should be minimal impacts on the environmental, social, economic and cultural integrity of tourist destinations.
- WWF believes that new sustainable transport infrastructure should be accessible to and used by local people as well as tourists. This will optimise benefits to them and to the poorest in society, and will also ensure that resource efficiencies are optimised.
- WWF believes that the tourism industry itself must take action to reduce its contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions. For example, energy supply at destinations should be shifted from fossil fuel to renewable sources such as wind, biomass and solar power. This needs to be coupled with more stringent efficiency standards – the introduction of compulsory energy rating schemes, for example, could also be employed in buildings such as hotels.

## **BACKGROUND – THE ISSUES**

### **Climate change, travel and tourism**

The biggest and fastest growing user of energy in the UK is the transport sector, rising from 19.5% of final energy use in 1970 to 35.5% in 2004. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport have doubled over this period. Aviation has by far the greatest climate impact of any transport mode, whether measured per passenger kilometre, per tonne kilometre, per € spent, or per hour spent. Rising energy demands are leading to huge emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. By ratifying the Kyoto Protocol<sup>12</sup>, the UK has made a commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5% from 1990 levels by 2010. Under the UK Climate Change Act, the government has committed to reduce UK emissions by at least 34% by 2020, and by at least 80% by 2050, from 1990 levels. The UK's share of international aviation and shipping is included in these targets.

Road transport and aviation growth are among the major obstacles the UK government faces to achieving its carbon emission reduction targets. Air travel is forecast to increase dramatically over the next decade, with emissions estimated to increase from the current 6% to 12% over the next 10-15 years. WWF believes that rapidly increasing aviation threatens to undermine the fight against climate change because aviation emissions alone are likely to exceed the UK's emission allocations by 2040-50, and there are relatively few technological solutions in the pipeline.

WWF-UK is campaigning for a wide range of improvements to the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). This follows the European Commission's decision to include aviation in the ETS so that the climate impacts of the sector can be embraced. WWF-UK welcomes this, but believes that it should be seen as a first step in addressing the climate change impacts of aviation – complementary policies and measures are absolutely essential and should be taken forward in parallel<sup>13</sup>.

Climate change is already having a major effect on habitats across the globe. The Arctic ice sheet – important feeding grounds for polar bears – is already in rapid retreat, for example. The tourism industry's heavy reliance on local environments means that it could face serious challenges as a result of climate change. Tourism has become both the victim and the vector of climate change.

### **The growth of travel**

Since 1960, global air passenger traffic (expressed as revenue passenger-kilometres) has increased by nearly 9% per year. International tourism is the largest and most rapidly expanding industry in the world and many tourist destinations depend on the surrounding natural environment for their appeal – tropical rainforests, wildlife safaris and coral reefs are some of the fastest growing and most popular travel destinations. All these have a rich biodiversity at their heart. UK air travel is expected to triple from 180 million to 500 million passengers per year over the next 30 years. In 2005, UK

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<sup>12</sup>The Kyoto Protocol, signed 1997 by 166 countries, is the first international treaty to set legally binding CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction targets on the developed countries that have ratified it. Developed countries agreed to targets that will reduce their overall emissions of a basket of six greenhouse gases, including CO<sub>2</sub>, by 5.2% below 1990 levels over the period 2008-12.

<sup>13</sup>The WWF response to the inclusion of aviation in the ETS is outlined in "Including aviation in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme – Joint NGO statement on key improvements".

residents made a record 66.4 million visits abroad – an increase of 4% on the previous year.

Flying was the most popular mode of travel for UK residents going abroad and for overseas residents visiting the UK. In 2005, UK residents made a record 53.6 million journeys by air, representing almost four-fifths of all visits abroad. The government's own forecasts show that demand for air travel in south-east England alone will rise from 117 million passengers in 2000 to about 200 million in 2015 and 300 million in 2030.

The growth in air travel has obvious repercussions in terms of the development and expansion of new airports. Based on government growth figures, it is estimated that five new airports will be required to cater for demand.

### **Tourism and the global economy**

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) forecasts that growth in international tourism will triple in next 20 years and that international arrivals are expected to rise from 700 million to 1.6 billion by 2020. Tourism generates more than 10% of global Gross Domestic Product and employs over 250 million people. It is the main money earner for a third of developing nations and the primary source of foreign exchange earnings for most of the 49 least developed countries.<sup>14</sup>

### **WWF and travel tourism**

WWF-UK no longer works directly on tourism as a policy issue. A number of our biodiversity conservation projects do, however, involve tourism initiatives to varying degrees.

WWF's Tourism Position Statement (WWF International, 2001) states that WWF and the tourism industry should share a common goal: the long-term preservation of the natural environment. It presents a vision that tourism development and practice should:

- be part of a wider sustainable development strategy;
- be compatible with effective conservation of natural ecosystems;
- use natural resources in a sustainable way while minimising pollution and waste;
- involve local people and cultures, ensuring that they have an equitable share in its benefits; and
- be informative and educational.

WWF-UK believes that all tourism must be planned, managed and undertaken in ways that maintain or enhance biological and cultural diversity, is environmentally sustainable, economically viable and socially equitable. We will engage with tourism-related activity where it threatens WWF's mission or can help deliver solutions. We also believe that ecotourism<sup>15</sup> and responsible tourism should be part of a wider sustainable development strategy, whether at a community, national or international level. To reduce the negative individual travel impacts associated with tourism, WWF-

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<sup>14</sup> World Tourism Organisation

<sup>15</sup> The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people".

UK has developed a Travel Smart Pledge which provides advice on how to minimise the negative impacts of a holiday<sup>16</sup>.

### *Responsible Tourism*

WWF-UK believes that the concept of “sustainable tourism” at an international level is currently an unachievable ideal, not least because of the significant contribution that air travel makes to climate change. It is therefore more useful to think about “responsible tourism” in the context of a wider sustainable development strategy.

Tourism impacts on WWF’s programmes in a number of ways – for example, climate change through air travel, and freshwater through water usage in hotels and golf courses. In addition, large-scale tourism development can pose threats to fragile ecosystems in key ecoregions (regions identified by WWF as priority areas for biodiversity conservation) such as the Mediterranean and the Mesoamerican Reef. On a smaller scale, ecotourism or community-based tourism is often proposed in field projects as an alternative sustainable livelihood for local communities. In Namibia, for example, tourism plays a key role in supporting wildlife reserves through income generation activities and employment for local people (see Box below: “An example of our dilemma – Wildlife Conservation in Namibia”).

**What is ecotourism?**

Ecotourism, also known as ecological tourism, is a form of tourism which is based on ecological and biodiversity conservation principles. Generally speaking, ecotourism focuses on local culture, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth, and learning new ways to live; it typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions.

Responsible ecotourism includes programmes that minimise the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment, and that enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities.

Several offices in the WWF network operate tourism programmes. The WWF Arctic programme, WWF-Brazil and WWF-Malaysia have all been instrumental in defining responsible tourism in their regions, and are working with the tourism industry to develop good practice and tourism certification schemes. The WWF Mediterranean Programme is also collaborating with the tourism industry to improve awareness of conservation issues among holidaymakers, and to seek its commitment to protect key coastal areas important to biodiversity. The WWF International Arctic Programme views tourism as one way to support the protection of the Arctic environment. It is working on tourism initiatives which can be conducted responsibly so that visitors learn to appreciate and respect Arctic nature and cultures, as well as providing an additional income to local communities and traditional lifestyles.

### **Impacts of tourism – economic, cultural, social and environmental**

The impacts of tourism are immense and very complex, not least because tourism can focus on the most vulnerable natural and cultural sites across the globe. One of WWF’s key objectives is conserving the world’s biological diversity. Today, short-term financial gains can often take precedence over long-term environmental and cultural considerations. The challenge is therefore to ensure that tourism reduces our global impact, particularly through release of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, while ensuring there are positive impacts on local environments, biodiversity and people.

Responsible tourism initiatives can be of enormous benefit to tourist destinations and we will work to achieve this transformation of the tourism industry. Responsible tourism

<sup>16</sup> For details of the WWF Travel Smart Pledge visit [http://passport.panda.org/campaigns/action\\_commitment.cfm?uCampaignId=1261&uActionId=1961](http://passport.panda.org/campaigns/action_commitment.cfm?uCampaignId=1261&uActionId=1961)

can generate employment and income, thus providing a strong incentive for conservation, and it plays a significant role in the creation, protection and conservation of many of the world's National Parks and other protected areas. It can also raise public awareness of the many goods and services provided by biological diversity, and of the needs to respect traditional knowledge and practices. It has the potential to reconcile economic and environmental concerns and give a practical meaning to the term "sustainable development".

#### *Consumption of natural resources*

Tourism creates a demand for a wide variety of resources – everything from food to raw materials, water and energy. This demand impacts on the consumption of natural resources. For example, in many parts of the world demand for freshwater resources can outstrip supply due to new hotels, swimming pools and golf courses that have been created for the tourist industry. This has been a particular problem where rainfall is low or where freshwater sources have become contaminated. Parts of the Mediterranean region illustrate this scarcity: WWF estimates that by 2025 half of all Mediterranean countries will be using freshwater resources in excess of their regeneration rates. This demand has forced up prices which in turn can result in local people being denied access to such resources. WWF believes that tourism development strategies must include sustainable freshwater use strategies and water conservation measures such as on-site rainwater harvesting schemes.

Raising awareness of these issues and encouraging tourists to conserve water, energy and other resources is a vital aspect of responsible tourism. This will involve the tourism industry improving its environmental standards and developing policies of good practice. WWF could have an ideal opportunity and important role to play in developing such practices in partnership with the industry.

#### *Biodiversity conservation*

Tourism's negative impact on wildlife and habitats occurs when activities disrupt biological resources or operate in ecologically fragile areas. For example, tourism can lead to increased pressure on endangered species due to trade and hunting, increased demand for fuelwood, and clearance of vegetation. Infrastructure such as new roads and resorts can also have a significantly detrimental effect. If tourism is not properly planned it can affect some of our most ecologically fragile areas such as wetlands, rain forests or coral reefs.

Tourism can also have a positive impact on the protection and conservation of biodiversity. There are many examples of money flowing into local communities, and of local people who turn from poacher to protector. The economic potential of biodiversity is increasingly recognised by governments across the world as an incentive to establish new reserves and National Parks.

#### *Waste and pollution*

Pollution and the production of waste as a result of tourism development can also affect the environment. Land can be contaminated by solid wastes and litter. Many tourism developments, particularly in developing countries, have inadequate waste management facilities or insufficient capacity to deal with new demands. Sewage from tourism development can affect freshwater sources if not properly treated. Marine waters and coasts are also vulnerable to waste and wastewater from hotels, marinas and cruise ships. Local and global air pollution, as well as noise pollution from aircraft and motorboats, are also common.

#### *Local cultures and communities*

For some tourists, the choice of a holiday destination includes the prospect of exploring and immersing themselves in a new cultural setting. For others it is simply about being somewhere different. Whatever the motivations, the visitor will inevitably have some impact on local cultures and communities they are visiting. Often tourism does not respect the rights and wishes of local people who may have little influence over the decision-making and consultation process around any tourism developments in their community. An influx of tourists to an area can also result in the erosion of local traditions, cultural values and other aspects of their cultural heritage.

On the other hand, the knowledge and experience of local communities can make a major contribution to responsible tourism. WWF believes that tourism projects must involve and promote respect for local people, their rights and cultures, and encourage their informed participation in tourism through long-term partnerships between local and non-local tour operators, businesses and suppliers.

### *Poverty*

UK tourists spend £2bn a year in developing countries – nearly half of the Department for International Development (DFID) development budget. Research by the Overseas Development Institute<sup>17</sup> shows that the poor within these developing countries can receive from 10-27% of income spent by tourists within the country- far more than has been previously assumed.

Tourism is significant and growing in many of the world's poor countries and is the principal export for 30% of developing countries. Tourism therefore has the potential to play a significant role in poverty reduction policies, particularly in the developing world.<sup>18</sup>

### *Education and awareness*

Tourism can provide an ideal opportunity for sharing local traditions, culture and heritage. There is also potential for a visitor to gain a greater understanding of other cultures and local environments. Many ecotourism projects focus on raising awareness of the issues around biodiversity conservation and the global effects of our actions through climate change or unsustainable consumption patterns.

Education, awareness and capacity building are key elements of responsible tourism. Everyone involved in tourism, including the tourist industry, local communities and governments, should be made aware of its impacts while encouraging and supporting biodiversity and conservation through its activities.

### **Carbon offsetting**

Carbon offsetting is seen by many in the travel and tourism industry as a way of compensating for our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to or within a travel destination. A carbon offset negates the release of one tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> in one place by avoiding the release of, or removing from the atmosphere the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub>, somewhere else. Carbon offsets can be generated by activities such as energy efficiency (e.g. installing energy-saving technologies in housing developments), renewable energy (e.g. wind farms) and sink (e.g. forestry) projects. Credits are then generated from these projects which can be sold to individuals, businesses and governments to offset their emissions.

A “gold standard” carbon offset was developed by WWF and other NGOs in response to concerns that emission reduction projects were not contributing to lowering CO<sub>2</sub>

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<sup>17</sup>Note : The data can be found at [www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706\\_tourism\\_vca.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706_tourism_vca.pdf) and [http://www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706\\_tourism\\_ptp.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/tourism/RESOURCES/briefings/0706_tourism_ptp.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> For further information on poverty and tourism, visit [www.propoortourism.co.uk](http://www.propoortourism.co.uk)

emissions. In 2006 a gold standard for the voluntary market was also launched. The standard for both the compliance and voluntary market is built on the procedures for the Clean Development Mechanism<sup>19</sup>, but includes three additional screens:

- Restriction to renewable energy and end-use energy efficiency improvement projects;
- robust tests of additionality and baselines, to ensure that emission reduction credits are not awarded to a project or activity that was going to happen anyway; and
- a sustainable development screen, including guidelines and frameworks for environmental impact assessments and extended stakeholder consultation.

WWF-UK only supports gold standard accredited offsetting schemes. We view carbon offsetting as a measure of last resort. We believe that there is a danger that some companies will use offsetting as a smokescreen to delay real cuts in emissions and the adoption of low-carbon technologies. We will work with and encourage travel and tourism companies to undertake a comprehensive carbon audit and make every effort to reduce emissions and adopt low-carbon technologies before offsetting any remaining emissions.

The gold standard does not cover forestry sink projects and in the absence of a robust standard for these projects we are concerned about their use to offset emissions. A robust standard would specifically need to address:

- Issues over permanency: although trees absorb CO<sub>2</sub> when they are living, it cannot be guaranteed that a new forest will be permanent. It is eventually likely to succumb to disease, fire or logging – releasing the CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere once again;
- issues over accurate calculation of CO<sub>2</sub> stored: for example, methods used to calculate the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> stored and estimations of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that a forest can absorb can differ vastly; and
- impact on the local environment and forest communities.

### **Certification**

Certification is a way of ensuring that a business, product or service meets certain standards. It awards a logo to those that, based on an audit or assessment, meet or exceed a set of baseline criteria. Today, certification is viewed as an important tool for distinguishing between genuine ecotourism or responsible tourism companies, products or services and those that are simply using “green” language to market themselves.

A new body called the Tourism Sustainability Council was formed in 2009 to act as a global accreditation body, as well as a framework for socially and environmentally responsible tourism certification programmes.

WWF is supporting this initiative while working on a number of other certification and accreditation schemes relating to tourism. For example, the International Hotels Initiative aims to help hotels worldwide improve their environmental performance. The

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<sup>19</sup> The Clean Development Mechanism is an offsetting standard created by the Kyoto Protocol to help industrialised countries meet their emissions reduction targets by investing in offset projects in developing countries which have not taken on reduction targets.

scheme will look at issues such as energy management, freshwater consumption, waste management, wastewater quality, purchasing programmes, community relations and biodiversity improvements in the hotel industry.

## THE DILEMMAS

WWF-UK confronts a number of dilemmas – not least the fact that travel brings both benefits and threats to wildlife conservation. Tourism provides income for a wide range of our field projects and local communities that support these, yet increasing carbon footprints bring threats to our climate and those same projects and communities. However, we also recognise that the impacts of climate change are expected to seriously and disproportionately affect the livelihoods of people living in poverty, as well as their chances of survival. Our priority therefore has to be tackling the issue of climate change which could undo much of our past work to support wildlife and local communities, particularly in the developing world.

Our priority within this position is the focus on minimising short-haul flights as these can more easily be substituted for other forms of transport, most notably the train. They are also proportionately more polluting. Although we must stabilise the numbers of long-haul flights, we recognise that these bring real benefits to the poorest people and countries in the developing world. Therefore, we seek to encourage both the use of low- or zero-carbon transport modes and responsible tourism.

However, we acknowledge that at present, transport for most responsible tourism activities involves air travel. As an organisation that focuses on finding solutions to environmental issues, WWF-UK will endeavour to champion low-carbon ecotourism and responsible tourism initiatives and explore partnership opportunities with “non-air” travel companies – those associated with coach tours, train travel, ferries, boat cruises etc.

WWF-UK also acknowledges that while we encourage ecotourism and responsible tourism projects, these can quite often be more expensive (reflecting the true costs of environmental sustainability) and therefore not accessible to those who cannot afford to pay such premiums. We aim to work with governments and industry to encourage

### **An example of our dilemma – wildlife conservation in Namibia**

A unique WWF-funded project in the Kunene region of Namibia has successfully tackled poaching of the rare black rhino and desert-adapted elephant, doubling wildlife numbers and creating alternative livelihoods for a rural, highly marginalised community. In the 1980s, poaching had devastated populations of these species while the communities in Kunene had no rights over the communal, government-owned land which they farmed – unlike the private landowners further south. This gave them little or no incentive to conserve the wildlife.

The approach taken by the Kunene project, run by WWF and its local partner, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), has dramatically changed this picture. It provides communities with alternative sources of income through ecotourism, so that the wildlife is valued as a natural resource. Conservancies were established in 1996 following extensive lobbying by the project. The boundaries of each conservancy area are negotiated and agreed by the local community which decides how to use the natural resources – for example, which areas to keep as pristine wildlife areas and where to allow tourism.

Conservancies are an exciting development, empowering poor, disfranchised rural people, providing alternative livelihoods to their subsistence farming and conserving wildlife into the bargain. A member of one conservancy committee summed up the project's success at a meeting to discuss a proposal for new tourist camps. He said tourism was helping to boost wildlife numbers while providing income for local people and those who were poorest.

#### **And yet...**

Flying to Namibia is the only realistic way of supporting this tourism initiative. On average, a return flight from London will release an estimated 5.7 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e into the atmosphere – more than half the carbon budget produced by the average UK citizen and over six times that produced by the average Indian in a year. Droughts in Namibia, which are likely to occur more often as a result of climate change, are threatening both the wildlife and the communities living in the region.

the development of responsible tourism initiatives which can be reached by cheaper, more sustainable modes of transport. For example, we believe that the economic system that results in the effective subsidisation of flights should end with income raised going towards the development of other sustainable modes of transport to reduce costs associated with these.

## **WWF, TOURISM, BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY**

WWF UK has developed a separate policy in relation to engagement with travel and tourism business and industry.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

### *WWF Reports*

1. Tourism: Facing Climate Change, WWF-UK, 1999
2. Climate change and its impacts on tourism, WWF-UK, 1999
3. Guidelines For Community Based Ecotourism, WWF International and WWF-UK, 2001
4. Tourism and Carnivores, WWF-UK, 2000
5. Tourism Certification, WWF-UK, 2000
6. Tourism Background Paper, WWF International, June 2001
7. Preliminary Assessment of the Environmental & Social Effects of Trade in Tourism, WWF International Discussion Paper, May 2001
8. GATS and Responsible Tourism, WWF International, Policy Position, 2001
9. WWF Code of Conduct for Mediterranean Tourists (undated)
10. Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic, WWF Arctic Programme, Norway, 2001

### *WWF websites*

1. Travel Smart Pledge  
[www.panda.org/how\\_you\\_can\\_help/at\\_home/travel/index.cfm](http://www.panda.org/how_you_can_help/at_home/travel/index.cfm)
2. WWF Arctic Programme and tourism  
[www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/where\\_we\\_work/europe/what\\_we\\_do/arctic/what\\_we\\_do/tourism/index.cfm](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/europe/what_we_do/arctic/what_we_do/tourism/index.cfm)
3. Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic  
[http://assets.panda.org/downloads/wwf\\_tourism\\_conservation.pdf](http://assets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_tourism_conservation.pdf)
4. WWF holiday footprinting - [wwf.org.uk/filelibrary/xls/holidayfootprint.xls](http://wwf.org.uk/filelibrary/xls/holidayfootprint.xls)

### *Other relevant organisations*

1. Responsibletravel.com (the UK's biggest responsible travel and tourism agency): [www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)
2. Tourism Concern: [www.tourismconcern.org.uk/index.html](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/index.html)
3. World Tourism Organisation: [www.world-tourism.org/](http://www.world-tourism.org/)
4. Eco-travelling website: [www.ecotravelling.co.uk](http://www.ecotravelling.co.uk)
5. Convention on Biological Diversity: [www.cbd.int/convention/default.shtml](http://www.cbd.int/convention/default.shtml)
6. International Ecotourism Society (Promoting responsible travel that unites conservation and communities): [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)
7. Centre on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development. It aims to improve ecotourism and sustainable tourism practices and principles. Its policy-oriented research focuses on ecotourism as a tool for poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation, as well as socially and environmentally responsible tourism practices: [www.ecotourismcesd.org/](http://www.ecotourismcesd.org/)

8. Foreign and Commonwealth Office – Sustainable Tourism Travel Advice: [www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1100182468244](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1100182468244)
9. The Travel Foundation (an independent charity which aims to help the outbound travel industry to manage tourism more sustainably): [www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/who\\_we\\_are.asp](http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/who_we_are.asp)
10. Gold Standard Carbon Offsetting: [www.cdmgoldstandard.org](http://www.cdmgoldstandard.org)
11. Pro-Poor Tourism (providing up-to-date information on tourism that results in increased net benefits for poor people): [www.propoortourism.org.uk](http://www.propoortourism.org.uk)

#### *Useful documents*

1. Tourism Highlights 2006, United Nations World Tourism Organisation. [www.unwto.org/facts/menu.html](http://www.unwto.org/facts/menu.html)
2. Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development 2004, Convention on Biological Diversity: [www.cbd.int/doc/publications/tou-gdl-en.pdf](http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/tou-gdl-en.pdf)
3. UN 2001 – Sustainable Development and Tourism: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/274/51/PDF/N0127451.pdf?OpenElement>

## **OTHER RELEVANT WWF POLICY POSITION STATEMENTS**

This Policy Position Statement on Travel and Tourism is a new WWF-UK Policy Position Statement published in December 2007 and does not replace any older versions.

Other relevant WWF Policy Position Statements of relevance include:

1. Tourism Position Statement (WWF International, October 2001)
2. Joint statement on offsetting carbon emissions (Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and WWF-UK, 2006)

## **FEEDBACK**

We are keen to receive your views and comments in response to this Policy Position Statement, which we will regularly update. We also need to be aware of any new piece of work/research/evidence by you that may affect this Policy Position Statement. There may also be gaps in the current position which we may not be aware of and which you may wish to highlight for any future review. Please click [here](#) to email your feedback. Please state which Policy Position Statement you are referring to.