



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
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On the occasion of
WORLD TOURISM DAY
27 September 2016**

“Tourism for All: Promoting Universal Accessibility”

Biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth, provides us with a wealth of natural resources that are extremely important for the tourism sector. Biodiversity underpins places of beauty that are so often popular tourist destinations, such as tropical forests, coast beaches and national parks, thus re-enforcing the notion that a healthy natural environment is one of the world’s most important tourism attractions. Visiting nature also serves to heighten awareness of its intrinsic value for us all.

In 1950 there were nearly 25 million international tourists crossing borders in a single year; today there are around 1.2 billion people travelling the world. Travelling has become an important part of many people’s lives and livelihoods. International tourism generates around US\$ 1.5 trillion worldwide per year in export earnings, accounting for about 9 per cent of global employment. For areas of unique natural beauty that attract large numbers of visitors, a healthy natural environment is an essential asset— a beach holiday, for example, requires clean, swimmable, water and healthy coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, coral reefs, coastal forests and the flora and fauna that inhabits them. Accordingly, the significance of tourism for biodiversity has been reflected in decisions by the Convention’s Conference of the Parties (COP) since the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 5) in 2000, where a decision by the Parties recognized the importance of tourism for social and economic development at local, national and regional levels. Sustainable tourism has the potential to contribute to meeting at least 12 of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, adopted in 2010.



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Recently, several decisions emanating from the mid-term review of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 at the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP 12), held in the Republic of Korea, served to highlight the important role that tourism serves, and called for further application of the *CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development*¹. Adopted in 2004² and relevant for tourism and biodiversity in all geographical locations and tourist destinations, the guidelines provide member states with guidance on how to make tourism and biodiversity mutually supportive.

Furthermore, at their meetings in 2016, both the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and its Subsidiary Body on Implementation recommended mainstreaming biodiversity within and across sectors, including tourism, at all levels and scales. The recommendations of both bodies will be advanced to COP 13, being held in December 2016 in Cancun, Mexico, as part of the thematic focus of the COP on mainstreaming of biodiversity in tourism, forestry, agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture, among other sectors.

One promising area for future work is the building of the capacity of national and subnational parks and protected area agencies to develop partnerships with the tourism sector as a means to contribute financially and technically to the establishment, operations and maintenance of networks of resilient protected areas.

Knowing and experiencing nature makes us happier, healthier people, and raises our understanding of the importance of nature and biodiversity. And yet, for many, experiencing nature first hand is not something that can be taken for granted. This is why the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) chose "Tourism for All - Promoting Universal Accessibility" as the theme for celebrating World Tourism Day 2016. Accessible tourism is the ongoing endeavour to ensure tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people, regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age. Approximately 15 per cent of the global population lives with some kind of disability or another. With rapidly ageing populations - estimates suggest that people over 60 years of age will constitute 22 per cent of the global population in 2050 - the number of people experiencing obstacles will only increase. Many of us will develop some form of disability at some point, perhaps requiring us to have specific requirements to access tourism infrastructure services and products. Accessible tourism for all is about creating conditions that make

¹ www.cbd.int/doc/programmes/tourism/tourism-manual-en.pdf

² See Decision VII/14 adopted at the seventh ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity: www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=7751.

tourism able to cater to the needs of the wide diversity of people, and creating products and services that can be enjoyed equally by everybody, regardless of one's abilities.

The value of universal access to places of natural beauty, and the chance to experience in person the incredible diversity of our planet and the nature it contains, is immeasurable. Our understanding and appreciation of the world we live in changes the more we see of it, which in turn helps shape decisions that benefit people and the ecosystems upon which we depend. Putting accessibility into public policies and business strategies in the tourist sector also makes business sense. And, with millions of people traveling the globe each year, tourism can serve as an ideal vehicle for promoting awareness of the importance of biodiversity and the urgent need for its conservation.
