

# Sustainable Tourism Program Overview



## Our Mission:

Conservation International believes that the Earth's natural heritage must be maintained if future generations are to thrive spiritually, culturally, and economically. Our mission is to conserve the Earth's living heritage—our global biodiversity—and to demonstrate that human societies are able to live harmoniously with nature.



## Tourism in Developing Countries

With more than \$2.4 billion earned each day, tourism is currently the world's largest and fastest growing industry, capturing 10% of the global economy. Roughly a quarter of a billion of the wealthiest people travel to some of the least developed countries in the world each year.

Donors and beneficiary countries are increasingly utilizing tourism as a tool for sustainable, socio-economic development. National governments include tourism in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as a means to:

- generate revenue and drive general economic development
- attract foreign direct investment
- finance infrastructure improvements, and
- diversify employment opportunities and incomes in rural areas

Tourism is one of the few industries that, when appropriately planned, can meet the economic needs of communities, conservationists and governments alike. With 700 million people traveling each year to the more than 33,000 Protected Areas (PAs) worldwide, sustainable tourism increasingly provides revenue for their management, as well as for the communities living within and around them. These sustainable tourism stakeholders are important allies in the struggle to preserve the natural environment.

Conservation International (CI) has nearly 20 years of experience working in sustainable tourism in the areas of:

- planning and developing community-based enterprises
- creating protected area public use management plans
- training and capacity building
- developing tourism competitiveness strategies with stakeholders
- working with the private sector to develop good practice guidelines
- creating strategic partnerships for conservation within the tourism industry and amongst foundations and individuals



(Quiver Tree (*Aloe pilansii*) in the Richtersveld National Park, South Africa)

Entry fees and recreational activity permits can generate significant revenue for the maintenance and operation of PAs. In South Africa approximately 60% of all foreign tourists visit a national park or game reserve; tourist receipts finance up to 80% of the South African National Parks Board's annual budget.

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**Our Approach:** *We provide a framework for strategic tourism interventions that foster economic growth, reduce poverty and create business incentives to conserve biodiversity. Increasing the value of the standing biodiversity is essential to conservation.*

In tourism value chains (TVCs) the long term competitiveness of products or services depends on the protection of the natural resources on which they are founded. Our work focuses on the development of strategic tourism interventions in Biodiversity Hotspots and Key Biodiversity Areas.

CI's role is not simply about attracting more tourists; thoughtful tourism policies, strategic planning and community involvement in tourism development can help ensure the sustainable use of natural resources. This enables local communities, who are the stewards of this important biodiversity, to realize the maximum benefits from tourism development.

Building on our experiences in Madagascar and Ecuador, we work closely with country programs using the TVC framework to increase the competitiveness of the tourism sector. The framework helps identify actors in the value chain, their roles, relationships and power dynamics, as well as information and benefit flows between critical actors in the tourism sector. The TVC also reveals opportunities and incentives for upgrading and behavior change and provides a comprehensive taxonomy for organizing and understanding constraints to the competitiveness of sustainable tourism.



(Locals bicycle along the recently decreed "Allée des Baobab" National Monument)

CI's TVC work in Madagascar linked the island nation to over 2,200 international tour operators and increased the revenue to National Parks in project areas by 17%. Through the projects, the TVC assisted 153 micro/small enterprises in the first year.

This enables the systematic identification of potential interventions that increase business incentives for integrating conservation and human development.

## Common Tourism Constraints:

### ✦ **Policy Constraints (e.g. land tenure):**

CI is working with the International Finance Corporation in Madagascar to improve the tourism investment climate through the modernization of the Tourism Act, simplification of investment procedures, and the development of an ecotourism concession framework.

### ✦ **Lack of/poor links to higher yielding end-markets and tour operators:**

CI has created a web-based electronic marketplace with [responsibletourism.com](http://responsibletourism.com) that provides partners with access to over 250 tour operators in the UK and EU specializing in sustainable tourism.

### ✦ **Short visitor stays at sites/destinations, few benefits retained at site/destinations:**

CI is supporting the development of a community-based tourism directory for sites in Madagascar to increase the awareness about diverse nature-based and cultural activities, encouraging tourists to stay longer and see more of the biodiversity.

### ✦ **Poor backward linkages to agriculture, local labor force and other inputs:**

CI partners with local NGOs to improve linkages between local agriculturalists and hotels involved to increase local benefits from tourism and strengthen the competitiveness of destinations by including more locally-sourced goods.

### ✦ **Lack of appropriate financing options, low quality financial products and services:**

CI works to improve regional linkages with Verde Ventures; a \$7-million CI-managed investment fund that strengthens small and medium-sized enterprises important to biodiversity conservation.

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