



2022 United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

Tourism Ocean Action

Towards a Circular and Regenerative Blue Economy

29th June 2022 from 13:00-14:15hrs, Lisbon, Portugal

Organized by: UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) in collaboration with the governments of Portugal and Kenya

Background on the event (one paragraph)

Tourism is the largest sector of the ocean-based industries representing 40% of its total export value. Coastal and maritime tourism plays a significant role in the economic prosperity of coastal and island communities, bringing jobs, investment and income. Besides the benefits of tourism development, there are also challenges such as the loss of biodiversity, pollution and resource consumption. Decoupling of socioeconomic development from environmental impacts from tourism is key to transition towards a circular and regenerative blue economy.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

1. As the recovery of the sector from COVID-19 progresses, it is essential to embrace the pause in international travel as an opportunity to switch to a blue economy – one that supports people, protects communities and safeguards the ocean – with tourism as the central driving force.
2. Tourism relies on a healthy ocean. Coastal ecosystems are top tourism destinations. Almost half of tourists globally choose a coastal destination for their vacation. The competitiveness of the tourism sector depends on healthy blue ecosystems.
3. Sustainable consumption and production is a key strategy to accelerate tourism ocean action. Tourism business models should embrace sustainable consumption and production patterns to protect marine and coastal ecosystems while driving transformation in the local economy to be more inclusive and resilient.
4. A net zero future for tourism will depend on the ocean. Around 25% of emissions are absorbed by the ocean. In 2019, tourism emissions were forecasted to grow by at least 25% by 2030. To ensure an effective transition to blue and green tourism and enable tourism stakeholders to embrace more low carbon operations, there is a need to mobilize finance and incentives.

5. Sustainable tourism creates a world where nature thrives alongside people. The demand of tourists for sustainable and regenerative experiences is growing. Regenerative tourism has potential to enhance the ocean's capacity to sequester carbon through investments in nature-based solutions and innovative approaches.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

1. Revisiting governance, policies and instruments: Tourism and environment policy makers shall join forces, as sustainable consumption and production should be the key pillar of tourism plans. Governance needs to be reinforced and policy instruments developed to enable measuring, monitoring and scaling-up tourism ocean action, including the increase of marine and coastal protected areas as tourism destinations.
2. Engaging the value chain ecosystem and strengthening partnerships: Every stakeholder in the tourism value chain has a role to play in tourism ocean action. Partnerships and collaboration and sharing experiences are the way forward to galvanize the individual efforts and create synergy.
3. Empowering micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to engage in circular business models: MSMEs, represent over 80% of tourism businesses globally. Enabling a shift towards circularity needs to be addressed and support programmes developed to accelerate ocean and climate action, including access to finance.
4. Shifting to a circular economy of plastics: Tourism service providers need to more efficiently use plastics (or any resource), keeping them in use for as long as possible, maximising their value, and then recycling/recovering them to make new products.
5. Accelerating decarbonization and regeneration as well as fostering innovation: The tourism sector has the potential to create a virtuous circle at destination level, investing in the protection and regeneration of blue carbon ecosystems that in turn can support the decarbonization of tourism operations.
6. Exploring innovative solutions and financing: Piloting technological applications, developing an ESG Framework for tourism, investing in unlocking blue carbon, and nudging consumers towards regenerative ocean experiences, among others, have potential to accelerate tourism ocean action.

Voluntary Commitments (one paragraph)

Initiatives such as the [Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism](#) and the [Global Tourism Plastics Initiative](#) represent tools to accelerate tourism ocean action. They operate as voluntary commitments with reporting mechanisms attached. The Glasgow Declaration is a catalyst for increased urgency about the need to accelerate climate action in tourism and to secure strong actions and commitment to support the global goals to halve emissions over the next decade and reach Net Zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050. Global Tourism Plastics Initiative unites the tourism sector behind a common vision to address the root causes of plastic pollution. It enables businesses, governments, and other tourism stakeholders to take concerted action, leading by example in the shift towards circularity in the use of plastics.