

PACIFIC MARINE AND COASTAL TOURISM



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

KEY POINTS

- Pacific tourism depends on healthy marine ecosystems for aesthetic appeal and for the ecosystem services that support human occupation.
- Coastal habitats and iconic [Pacific species](#) (many of whose populations are depleted) are major tourism draws but are under threat from land-use change, [invasive species](#), unsustainable harvest, and [climate change](#).
- Many of the coastal [wetlands and reefs](#) of the Pacific Ocean valued by tourists are also significant [carbon sinks](#), and their carbon uptake and storage can be increased by restoring degraded ecosystems.
- Today's tourists increasingly demand environmentally responsible practices and healthy environments. Sustainable tourism requires informed, integrated management.
- Pacific island countries face challenges in planning for sustainable development of infrastructure as well as sea and land uses related to tourism.

HOW ISSUE LINKS TO/IMPACTS SDGs BEYOND **SDG14 LIFE BELOW WATER**

- SDG1: Tourism is an economic driver in the Pacific islands region.
- SDG6, 9, 11: The increased number of visitors and linked coastal development requires sound planning¹ for clean freshwater and sanitation systems and resilient infrastructure.
- SDG 7, 12, 14, 15: The tourism industry requires responsible consumption and production practices, including clean energy and avoidance of degradation of life on land and in water, for continued availability of the features that attract tourists.

BACKGROUND

1. **Approximately half of all international tourists travel to coastal areas, globally.** Coastal tourism and recreation contribute to [economic growth](#) by creating job opportunities and providing an important source of income and foreign exchange earnings. In Small Island Developing States (SIDS), tourism can account for more than 25% of the national GDP² and up to 80% in Pacific countries like Solomon Islands. Tourism drives other local economies as well: the total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP is three times greater than its direct contribution.³
2. **The ecosystems and environments that attract tourists are under threat.** An estimated 20% of global mangroves have been lost, 19% of [coral reefs](#) have disappeared, and 29% of seagrass habitat has vanished. The remainder is under threat. Coastal habitat loss is between 0.5% and 3% of their global area per year, resulting in 0.15–1.02 billion tonnes of CO₂ released annually (equivalent to burning 423 billion litres of petrol, more than used by all commercial airlines each year).⁴ Preservation of coastal habitats is globally valuable as a climate change mitigation measure and to support tourism economies. Coastal habitat preservation in the Pacific islands requires integrated ocean management and a “ridge-to-reef” approach due to the close links between island and sea.
3. **Tourism infrastructure and practices vary in environmental impact.** Tourists alter the environments that they visit through their travel practices, energy consumption, requirements for infrastructure and development of tourist facilities, and even the sunscreen they wear, which can be toxic e.g. to corals.⁵ Creating a culture of sustainable tourism that is led by Pacific values and the reality of long-term dependence on marine and coastal environments can generate value for Pacific branded tourism.
4. **Environmental sustainability is an increasingly important factor in tourist's decisions.** Tourists are able to accurately perceive comparative environmental health or degradation, and this perception is directly related to the likelihood of returning for another visit or recommending the site to others.^{6,7} Today's tourists are increasingly seeking sound practices and healthy environments, with ecotourism growing as a fraction of total tourism by over 10% annually.





5. **Environmentally sound tourism is a key opportunity for Pacific islands.** As in many developing nations, ready access to unique environmental features is a major draw. Coral reefs attract 350 million people and drive over USD 30 billion each year in tourism revenue globally.⁸ In Palau, the lifetime value of a live shark is USD 1.9 million for dive tourism. Globally, about 600,000 people spend over USD 300 million annually to watch sharks, supporting 10,000 jobs worldwide.⁹
6. **Pacific species and heritage offer unique tourism value.** The Pacific Ocean is home to over half of the world's whale and dolphin species. Whale-watching is a multi-million-dollar Pacific industry, with further potential. In Indonesia, manta rays support over USD 10 million annually in dive expenditure from just 11 dive sites.⁸
7. **Pacific underwater cultural heritage is largely undeveloped for tourism.** There are over 4,000 heritage sites in the Pacific, many accessible to snorkelers and divers.⁹

- 1 UNEP 2009. Sustainable coastal tourism: an integrated planning and management approach.
- 2 UNWTO, Secretariat of Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (2012): Destination Wet Lands: supporting sustainable tourism.
- 3 World Travel and Tourism Council. 2016. Travel & Tourism: Economic Impact 2015 Asia Pacific.
- 4 Spalding et al. 2016. Atlas of Ocean Wealth. The Nature Conservancy
- 5 Downs et al. 2015. Toxicological effects of the sunscreen UV filter, oxybenzone... Arch Environ Contam Toxicol 70:265–288
- 6 Schuhmann P. 2011. Tourist perceptions of beach cleanliness in Barbados: implications for return visitation. Etudes Caribbéennes 2011:5251
- 7 Sadat & Chang. 2016. The Impact of Environmental Quality of Revisiting Intention. J Qual Assur Hospit Tour 17:209–223
- 8 Spalding et al. 2016. Atlas of Ocean Wealth. The Nature Conservancy
- 9 UNESCO 2010. Underwater Cultural Heritage in Oceania. 111 p