



Overview

Travel and tourism: Priority actions towards a nature-positive future

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Introduction

Travel and tourism has a central role to play in the transition to a nature-positive world – as a growing sector, and as an agent of positive change in making sure both nature, local communities and local economies thrive. The sector currently provides 1 in 11 jobs and contributes more than 9% of the world's GDP with international tourism revenue reaching US\$ 1 trillion in 2022.^{1,2} Beyond driving global economic growth and development, the sector often galvanises governments to better protect their cultural and natural heritage.³

The travel and tourism sector is intrinsically linked to nature. More than 80% of the value of its goods and services are dependent on nature's resources and ecosystems.⁴ Exploration of nature accounts for over half of all tours, with nature-based tourism growing in popularity and predicted to generate US\$ 665 billion annually by 2030.⁵

As with all other parts of the economy, travel and tourism currently contribute to biodiversity loss. Yet, managed well and with the right safeguards in place, the sector can drive economic growth and sustainable development, promote the health of both people and planet by supporting local communities, and drive investments in Nature-based Solutions and Protected Areas. And it has much to gain from doing so: for every dollar spent on

protected areas and nature-based tourism, the rate of return is at least six times the original investment,^{6,7} demonstrating the sector's potential as a "Guardian of Nature".

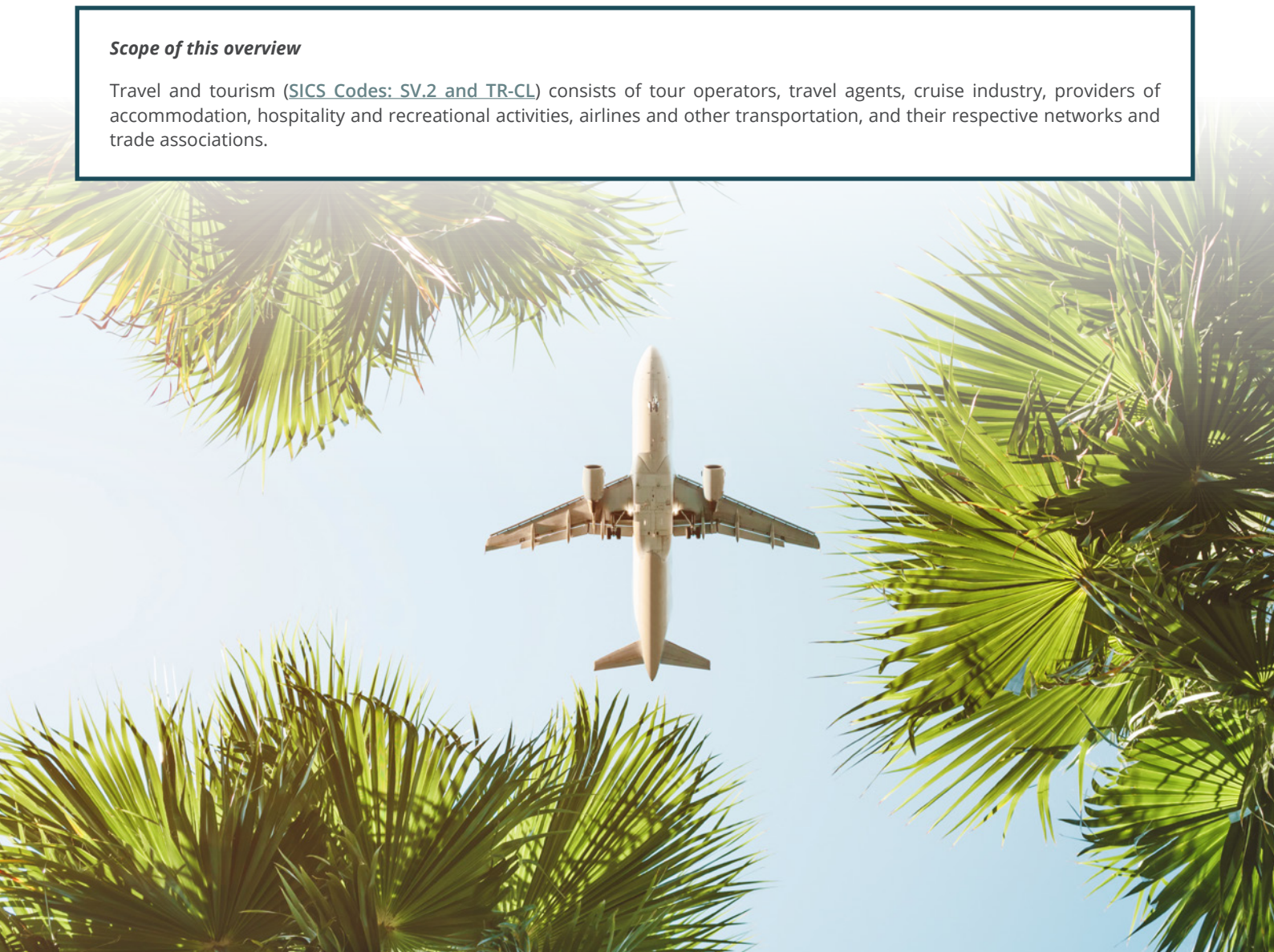
To fulfil this potential and build long-term resilience to climate change and nature loss, the sector needs to shift towards circular and regenerative business models.

To complement ongoing sustainability initiatives, all businesses need to **Assess, Commit, Transform and Disclose** (ACT-D high-level business actions on nature). They should acknowledge the value of nature to their business; assess and measure their impacts and dependencies on nature; set transparent, time-bound, science-based targets; take actions to address their key impacts and dependencies; and publicly disclose performance and other relevant nature-related information.

This overview provides a sector-level summary of potential key impacts and dependencies on nature. Importantly, it also sets out the priority actions that all businesses should take now to **transform** and ensure the travel and tourism sector plays its role in halting and reversing nature loss by 2030 - the mission at the heart of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#).

Scope of this overview

Travel and tourism ([SICS Codes: SV.2 and TR-CL](#)) consists of tour operators, travel agents, cruise industry, providers of accommodation, hospitality and recreational activities, airlines and other transportation, and their respective networks and trade associations.



Nature-related impacts

To protect and enhance the ecosystems on which they depend, travel and tourism businesses should direct their efforts towards addressing the most significant impacts on nature in their operations and value chains,⁸ namely:

- **Land and sea use change** – The development of tourism infrastructure such as hotels, resorts and roads often result in changes in land and sea use, leading to nature degradation and the fragmentation of habitats. Examples include the alteration of coastlines for resort and marina developments, the draining of wetlands for golf courses, the construction of access roads or the creation of shipping and cruise routes.
- **Terrestrial and marine ecosystem disturbance and wildlife exploitation** – Unregulated tourism activities, such as wildlife encounters and attractions, can disrupt the natural behaviours and habitats of animals. These activities can lead to poor animal welfare, habitat degradation, and even contribute to illegal wildlife trade. Over-tourism in sensitive areas can cause disturbances to breeding and feeding activities, affecting wildlife populations and their ecosystems. Overfishing and the utilization of plant and animal species for consumption, materials, souvenirs or entertainment can lead to species loss.
- **Natural resources use** – With a material footprint of between 5 and 8% of global extraction, and a water footprint equivalent to 0.6% of global water use, the sector significantly contributes to resource exploitation, encompassing energy, water and raw materials.⁹ Water usage for hotels, food production and water-

intensive activities like swimming pools and golf courses can lead to localized water shortages. Depleted or damaged natural resources also impact local people.¹⁰

- **Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** – The energy-intensive operations of accommodation facilities and the carbon-intensive nature of air travel and cruises are key factors driving the sector's emissions, making travel and tourism a significant contributor to the global GHG footprint.
- **Pollution** – Tourism activities, and the supply chain operations that support them, can lead to pollution from chemicals (including herbicides, pesticides and cleaning chemicals), waste disposal (such as packaging, end-of-life items, food and human waste), noise (from facilities, transport and recreational activities, including some within natural and protected areas) and light (particularly artificial light at night), all of which can damage natural habitats and impact wildlife.
- **Invasive alien species** – The intentional or accidental introduction of species from other parts of the world can disrupt ecosystems by outcompeting native species for natural resources. This impacts biodiversity and causes significant economic damage. Sources include the use of exotic plants in landscaping, the release or escape of exotic pets, and the accidental introduction of 'stowaways' in tourists' luggage, produce, natural materials, imported soil and ballast water from ships.

Nature-related dependencies

Like many sectors, travel and tourism is dependent on a number of ecosystem assets, flows and services to function and grow. In particular, travel and tourism businesses rely heavily on:

- **Terrestrial and marine ecosystems and wildlife** – Nature-based tourism activities rely on intact ecosystems such as savannahs, forests, coral reefs and other natural areas, while many visits that are not exclusively nature-based still benefit from these features. The existence, or use, of wildlife, both plants and animals, frequently enhances the tourism experience.
- **Freshwater** – This is an essential service for the sector, used directly in hospitality, cleaning and cooking in tourism establishments, and indirectly in the production of materials and products as well as for growing food for tourist consumption.
- **Natural resources** – Travel and tourism relies on a wide range of materials and products to provide its services, many of them derived from natural sources. Construction materials, furnishings and practical items from bedding to cutlery can all ultimately come from natural sources.
- **Energy** – Travel and tourism depends on energy for transportation, accommodation facilities and various tourism activities. This includes fuel consumption for air, road, rail and marine travel, as well as energy usage for heating, cooling, lighting, and other amenities. The specific dependency varies according to the energy source used - spanning solar, wind, hydro, geothermal and biofuel energy as well as fossil fuel feedstocks.
- **Climate regulation** – Nature provides climate regulating services at a global and regional level, in part through the long-term storage of carbon dioxide in soils, vegetable biomass, and the oceans. This supports a stable climate which is critical for travel and tourism to attract visitors (especially for weather-dependent activities such as skiing) and to avoid disturbances to travelling and tourism operations due to extreme weather events.

These dependencies strengthen the business case to invest in the protection and restoration of nature.



Priority actions and opportunities

Businesses in the travel and tourism sector are encouraged to adopt a [Nature Positive Tourism](#)ⁱ approach - to minimize identified harms, while investing in nature restoration in the destinations they visit and monitoring and reporting on both positive and negative impacts.

As a business in the travel and tourism sector, you should prioritize these five key actions:

1. Avoid and reduce over-tourism in sensitive areas – Promote responsible practices by working with destination partners to avoid exceeding the carrying capacity of touristic sites in sensitive areas (including key biodiversity areasⁱⁱ and critical habitatsⁱⁱⁱ), diversifying tourist activities and destinations and encouraging off-peak travel. Relocate facilities from sensitive areas to avoid habitat damage and support community-based tourism initiatives to protect natural resources and alleviate strain on heavily visited areas. Encourage best practice to reduce wildlife disturbance, such as prohibiting the feeding and touching of wildlife, and implementing minimum distance requirements.

2. Avoid and reduce resource use and pollution^{iv} – Implement waste management measures to reduce pollution and encourage travellers to stop littering. Embed responsible sourcing policies throughout your supply chain and work with supply chain partners to embed water and energy efficiency practices and reduce resource use. Support local waste and water management infrastructure and work with local communities to manage local resources collaboratively.

3. Restore and regenerate tourism destinations – Protect and enhance ecosystems in locations that attract visitors and scale business models that generate funding for nature conservation. Work with destination partners and suppliers to reduce their impacts and dependencies on nature and implement measures to prevent the introduction and spread

of invasive species. Restore degraded ecosystems, reforest areas, and rehabilitate habitats in collaboration with local communities and conservation organizations to ensure long-term sustainability and protection.

4. Transform tourism by engaging meaningfully with Indigenous Peoples and local communities – Respect and support the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, empowering them to make decisions about the use of their land or sea. Incorporate indigenous voices to inform conservation efforts. Work with communities to co-develop diversified livelihoods opportunities, and provide capacity building and investment support to protect nature and buffer communities from fluctuations in travel and tourism.

5. Transform tourism by advocating for responsible travel – Actively engage with travellers, destination partners, travel advisors, suppliers, local communities and employees to foster a shift towards more responsible and sustainable travel practices. Offer a range of sustainable travel options, such as promoting train travel over car, boat or air travel, and curate experiences that align with nature conservation, such as birdwatching or cycling tours. Support citizen science initiatives to involve tourists in collecting valuable data for environmental research and conservation efforts during their travels. Encourage travellers to engage with the local community, supporting local businesses, restaurateurs and artisans to create a more authentic and responsible travel experience.

Importantly, efforts to deliver these priority actions and transform the sector must be delivered in alignment with a just and equitable transition, including meaningful dialogue with affected groups, such as employees, local communities, Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities.

Adopting the priority actions can help businesses contribute to societal and environmental objectives, including the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [Read the GBF-SDG mapping to see how the priority actions can contribute to these objectives.](#)

ⁱ The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (SHA) have established the Nature Positive Tourism Partnership to help transform the sector to meet its obligations under the UN Global Biodiversity Framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

ⁱⁱ A site contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity.

ⁱⁱⁱ Any area of the planet with high biodiversity conservation significance, based on the existence of habitat of significant importance to critically endangered or endangered species, restricted range or endemic species, globally significant concentrations of migratory and/or congregatory species, highly threatened and/or unique ecosystems and key evolutionary processes.

^{iv} Regularly assess your impacts and dependencies on nature and measure key performance indicators to ensure action is taken to avoid and reduce the most material areas.

Resources

This overview was derived from:

- [Nature Positive Travel and Tourism](#) (World Travel & Tourism Council)
- [Toolbox of Nature Positive Tourism Resources](#) (World Travel & Tourism Council)

The following **sector-specific guidance and tools** are currently available to companies in the travel and tourism sector:

- [NATOUR IMPACT](#) (ANIMONDIAL) – Evaluation tool for the tourism sector to assess operational and destination-based impacts.
- [The Pathway to Net Positive Hospitality](#) (Sustainable Hospitality Alliance) – Guidance for hotels and hospitality.

- [Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria](#) (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) – Sustainability standards for hotels and accommodations, tour operators, destinations and others.
- [Tourism and visitor management in protected areas](#) (IUCN)
- [Building and operating biodiversity-friendly hotels](#) (IUCN)
- [Animal Protection Network](#) (ANIMONDIAL) – Matching tourism businesses with community-based projects that protect animals and nature.
- [Wildlife Heritage Areas](#) – Harnessing the power of tourism to protect outstanding wildlife watching.

For additional sector-agnostic resources, please refer to Business for Nature's [High-level Business Actions on Nature](#).

Contributors and credits

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References

¹ [Economic Impact of Travel & Tourism](#) (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023)

² [UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Volume 21, Issue 2](#) (UNWTO, 2023)

³ [Cancun Declaration on Mainstreaming the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity for Well-being](#) (UN Convention on Biological Diversity, 2016)

⁴ [Nature Risk Rising: Why the Crisis Engulfing Nature Matters for Business and the Economy](#) (World Economic Forum, 2020)

⁵ [Ecotourism Market Size, Share & Growth 2022-2030](#) (Grand View Research, 2020)

⁶ [Fostering Sustainable Tourism Across Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (Inter-American Development Bank)

⁷ [Banking on Protected Areas: Promoting sustainable nature-based tourism to benefit local communities](#) (World Bank, 2021)

⁸ [Nature Positive Travel & Tourism & Toolbox of Nature Positive Tourism Resources](#) (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022)

⁹ [Environmental Impact of Travel & Tourism](#) (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023)

¹⁰ Ibid.

