

World Tourism Day **27 Sept** 2013

TOURISM & WATER



Protecting our Common Future 

Background **Paper**



ABOUT TOURISM AND WATER

Water is one of the world's most precious natural resources. In tourism, it is both a critical resource and asset for most destinations.

Clean, accessible water is an integral resource, running most of the tourism sector's businesses, from hotels and restaurants, to leisure facilities and transportation. Wetland tourism is a growing segment, with many of the world's coastlines and lakes being some of the most popular tourist destinations today.

Many of those natural attractions where water is an essential element are key to the tourism sector and thus a source of tourism-related employment and income in countries worldwide. Yet freshwater reserves are being threatened by a growing world population, excessive water consumption, weak water management, poor sanitation and global climate change. Increased water demand by tourists and local communities has an impact not only on human needs but also on flora and fauna. Without good planning and adaptation, development opportunities are missed and millions of lives are put at risk.

“With unsustainable consumption and climate change threatening global water resources, this year's World Tourism Day highlights the responsibility of the tourism industry to safeguard and intelligently manage water.”

Ban Ki-moon, **UN Secretary-General**



TOURISM: CONTRIBUTING TO WATER PRESERVATION

At the global level, tourism does not consume excessive quantities of water - the challenge is rather to be found at destination level regarding the competition for water.

Overall, tourism consumes 1% of water, as compared to agriculture's 70% (Gössling, 2002). Consumption can be additionally cut by up to 23% through investments in water efficiency in the tourism sector, boosting its contribution to economic growth and jobs (United Nations Green Economy Report, 2011).

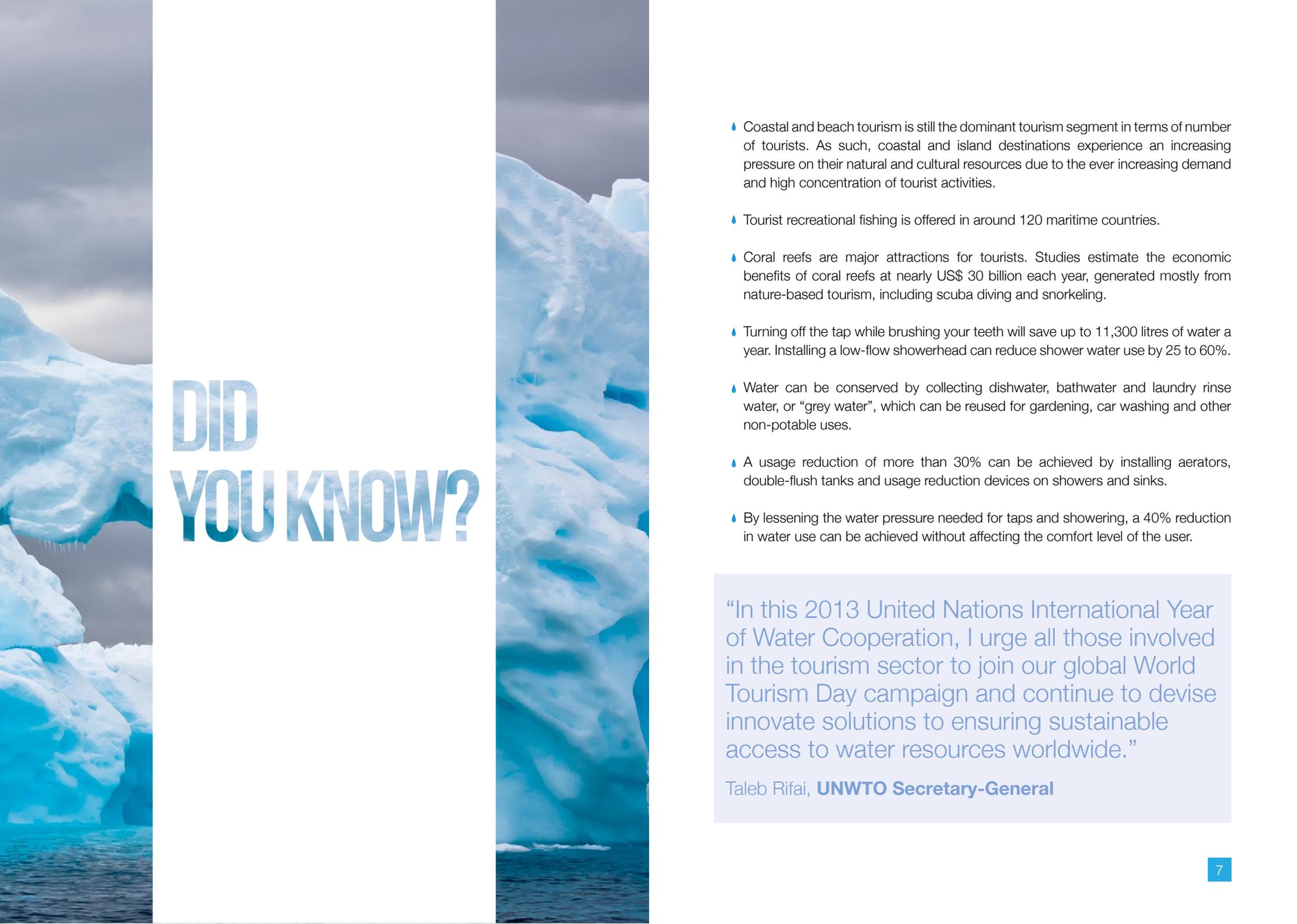
Tourism's contribution to water preservation is key on two accounts: the sustainable development of tourism in water destinations (coastal areas, lakes, etc.) and the effective management of water resources in tourism activities and operations.

Over recent years, the tourism sector has made great strides in conserving water whenever possible:

- ◆ Water accounts for 10% of utility bills in many hotels. Most hotels pay for the water they consume twice – first by purchasing fresh water and then by disposing of it as waste water. Depending on their water efficiency, hotels can reduce the amount of water consumed per guest per night by up to 50%.
- ◆ Many hotels and restaurants now have well-established systems in place which help reduce water consumption and improve waste management.
- ◆ Environmentally sound and innovative solutions have been developed, motivating positive guest behavior regarding water use and/or food waste composting.
- ◆ Water consumption is being reduced through simple actions such as installing leak detection instruments, low flush toilets and low flow showerheads.

Looking forward, the tourism sector must continue to innovate and offer new solutions that address the global water challenge. Raising the awareness on the importance of water conservation among tourists, staff in tourism establishments and local communities, must become a priority. Joint water and waste management strategies must be reached between the tourism sector and local and national authorities.

Water is also a main element of several destinations where coastlines, rivers and lakes are among the most productive of the world's ecosystem as well as places for tourism and recreation. Well-managed tourism contributes to the sustainability of wetlands and presents therefore additional opportunities for a positive contribution of tourism towards the water challenge.

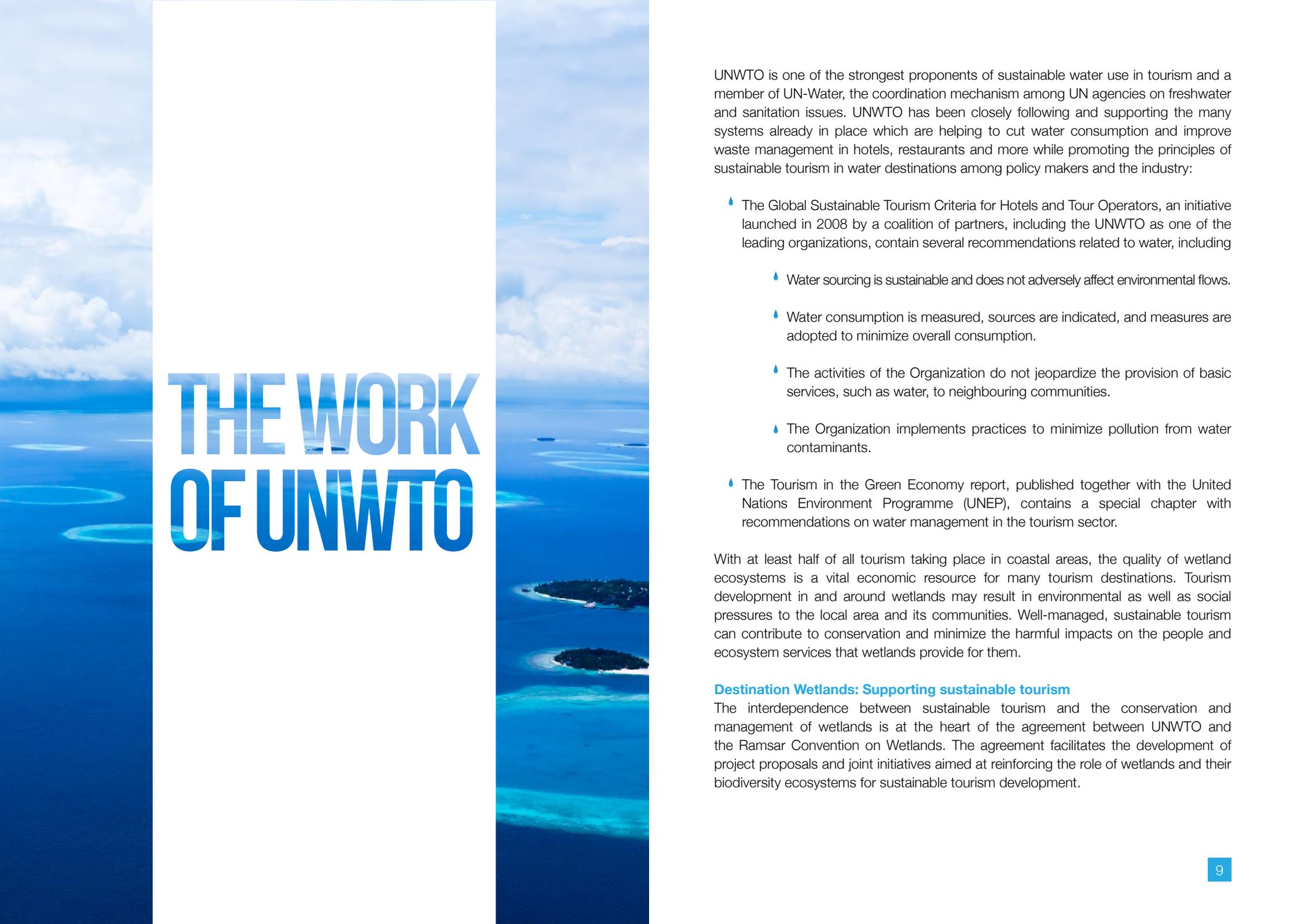


DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ Coastal and beach tourism is still the dominant tourism segment in terms of number of tourists. As such, coastal and island destinations experience an increasing pressure on their natural and cultural resources due to the ever increasing demand and high concentration of tourist activities.
- ◆ Tourist recreational fishing is offered in around 120 maritime countries.
- ◆ Coral reefs are major attractions for tourists. Studies estimate the economic benefits of coral reefs at nearly US\$ 30 billion each year, generated mostly from nature-based tourism, including scuba diving and snorkeling.
- ◆ Turning off the tap while brushing your teeth will save up to 11,300 litres of water a year. Installing a low-flow showerhead can reduce shower water use by 25 to 60%.
- ◆ Water can be conserved by collecting dishwater, bathwater and laundry rinse water, or “grey water”, which can be reused for gardening, car washing and other non-potable uses.
- ◆ A usage reduction of more than 30% can be achieved by installing aerators, double-flush tanks and usage reduction devices on showers and sinks.
- ◆ By lessening the water pressure needed for taps and showering, a 40% reduction in water use can be achieved without affecting the comfort level of the user.

“In this 2013 United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation, I urge all those involved in the tourism sector to join our global World Tourism Day campaign and continue to devise innovate solutions to ensuring sustainable access to water resources worldwide.”

Taleb Rifai, **UNWTO Secretary-General**



THE WORK OF UNWTO

UNWTO is one of the strongest proponents of sustainable water use in tourism and a member of UN-Water, the coordination mechanism among UN agencies on freshwater and sanitation issues. UNWTO has been closely following and supporting the many systems already in place which are helping to cut water consumption and improve waste management in hotels, restaurants and more while promoting the principles of sustainable tourism in water destinations among policy makers and the industry:

- The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators, an initiative launched in 2008 by a coalition of partners, including the UNWTO as one of the leading organizations, contain several recommendations related to water, including
 - Water sourcing is sustainable and does not adversely affect environmental flows.
 - Water consumption is measured, sources are indicated, and measures are adopted to minimize overall consumption.
 - The activities of the Organization do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as water, to neighbouring communities.
 - The Organization implements practices to minimize pollution from water contaminants.
- The Tourism in the Green Economy report, published together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), contains a special chapter with recommendations on water management in the tourism sector.

With at least half of all tourism taking place in coastal areas, the quality of wetland ecosystems is a vital economic resource for many tourism destinations. Tourism development in and around wetlands may result in environmental as well as social pressures to the local area and its communities. Well-managed, sustainable tourism can contribute to conservation and minimize the harmful impacts on the people and ecosystem services that wetlands provide for them.

Destination Wetlands: Supporting sustainable tourism

The interdependence between sustainable tourism and the conservation and management of wetlands is at the heart of the agreement between UNWTO and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The agreement facilitates the development of project proposals and joint initiatives aimed at reinforcing the role of wetlands and their biodiversity ecosystems for sustainable tourism development.

In recognition of the interdependence between sustainable tourism and the conservation and sustainable management of wetlands, the publication “Destination Wetlands: Supporting Sustainable Tourism”, was launched on July 2012, within the framework of the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP11) in Bucharest, Romania.

The publication provides an overview of existing guidelines on sustainable tourism and other useful materials on sustainable tourism management. It is particularly relevant to wetland site managers, tourism and wetland policy-makers and planners, and the private sector. Through 14 case studies, covering different wetland types around the world and illustrating the diversity in the scale of tourism, the management processes in place, the many challenges encountered and, wherever possible, the management solutions employed the publication demonstrates how sustainable tourism practices in and around wetlands can contribute to conservation, economic growth, poverty reduction and support to local cultures.

UNWTO’s principles of sustainable tourism are used as an important tool for the Ramsar Convention in applying sustainable practices in managing wetlands, through sound policies, planning and awareness-raising.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

UNWTO has been actively supporting SIDS and other islands, where tourism accounts for more than 25% of their GDP, through initiatives in areas such as climate change, energy efficiency, biodiversity and poverty alleviation. From 11-13 September 2013 UNWTO and the Government of France co-organized an international conference on tourism development in islands. The conclusions of this conference constitute an important input of the tourism sector toward the United Nations process of support to SIDS, culminating with an international conference in Samoa (September 2014).

On the ground projects worldwide

Several UNWTO projects around the world support biodiversity conservation and environmental awareness in coastal areas, including:

COAST: The Collaborative Actions for Sustainable Tourism Project supports and enhances the conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems and associated biodiversity in Sub-Saharan Africa – Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles and Tanzania – through the reduction of the environmental impacts of coastal tourism.

STREAM: The Sustainable Tourism through Energy Efficiency with Adaptation and Mitigation Measures Project in Pangandaran, Indonesia, implements coastal zone protection activities and the rehabilitation and conservation of mangroves and coral reefs in Pangandaran, a popular tourism destination in Java, that is being impacted by climate change.

The Mekong River Discovery Trail: Launched in 2007, this ecotourism destination in northeast Cambodia is a result of a project implemented by UNWTO with support from the UNWTO ST-EP Foundation, the Netherlands Development Organisation SNV, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), and the Government of Cambodia.

UNWTO has assisted in the planning and development of the 180 km long trail, including development of infrastructure and sustainable tourism products, as well as capacity building with local stakeholders in the areas of hospitality, tour guiding and English language skills.

Using sustainable tourism development to generate jobs and alleviate poverty in the provinces of Kratie and Stung Treng, the Discovery Trail aims to help protect and raise awareness of the importance of the Mekong to well-being of the region. Estimations show that by 2017, tourism will employ some 4200 people in Kratie and Stung Treng, some of the poorest regions in Cambodia.



FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Publications and articles

- ◆ UNWTO: Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism Development in Small Island Developing States
- ◆ UNWTO: Tourism and Biodiversity – Achieving Common Goals Towards Sustainability
- ◆ UNWTO/RAMSAR: Destination Wetlands – Supporting Sustainable Tourism
- ◆ UNWTO/UNEP: Tourism in the Green economy
- ◆ UNEP: A Manual for Water and Waste Management: What the Tourism Industry can do to improve its Performance
- ◆ UNEP Green Economy Report
- ◆ UNESCO: The United Nations World Water Development Report 4
- ◆ Gössling, S. (2002), Global environmental consequences of tourism, *Global Environmental Change*, 12(4), 283-302
- ◆ Gössling et al. (2011). *Tourism and Water Use: Supply, Demand, and Security An International Review*

UNWTO Projects

- ◆ Sustainable Tourism through Energy Efficiency with Adaptation and Mitigation Measures (STREAM), Indonesia
- ◆ Collaborative Actions for Sustainable Tourism (COAST), various countries in sub-Saharan Africa
- ◆ Mekong River Discovery Trail, Cambodia

Websites

- ◆ World Tourism Day 2013
- ◆ UN Documentation Centre on Water and Sanitation, Tourism Section
- ◆ UN International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015
- ◆ UK Environment Agency: Saving water in hotels and guest houses

Find all the resources above online:

<http://wtd.unwto.org/en/WTD13backgroundpaper>



The World Tourism Organization, a United Nations specialized agency, is the leading international organization with the decisive and central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism know-how. Its membership includes 156 countries, 6 territories, 2 permanent observers and over 400 Affiliate Members.

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