

Sustainable Tourism Central to the Future of Africa's Parks



Tourism is one of the most effective ways to preserve Africa's national parks and protected areas while creating jobs and income for local communities. This was one of the main conclusions of the First Pan-African Conference on Sustainable Tourism in African National Parks, organized by UNWTO and the Government of Tanzania.

"Nature is one of Africa's greatest assets," said UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai, opening the Conference. "Many of the 50 million international tourists visiting Africa each year are driven by the continent's unparalleled wildlife and natural scenery. These tourists spend in the local economy, sustain jobs and provide an incentive for conservation, making tourism a powerful engine for sustainable development."

The importance of sustainable tourism development for national parks and the people living in and around them was echoed in the Arusha Declaration, adopted by attending tourism ministers, tourism private sector representatives and conservation officials.

Signatories to the Declaration underlined the importance of good governance in managing park tourism, calling for collaborative action among the relevant stakeholders, particularly between public authorities and the private sector. The Declaration further stressed "the need to directly involve local communities in the management of parks and protected areas to ensure they gain concrete benefits in terms of employment and income generation".

Knowledge exchange between African countries should be prioritized, agreed signatories, given the potential for countries with more limited experience in park tourism to benefit from best practices elsewhere in Africa.

Contacts:

UNWTO Principal Media Officer: [Marcelo Risi](#)

Tel: (+34) 91 567 81 60

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