



Development of Protected Area Management



Standard Operational Procedures (SOP)

St. Kitts and Nevis

SOP 3

NATURE TOURISM / ECOTOURISM ENVIRONMENTAL ANIMATION

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Purpose and scope

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) developed the International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism (Guidelines for activities related to the development of sustainable tourism in vulnerable terrestrial, coastal and mountain ecosystems). UNEP also coordinated the Tour Operators Initiative, which developed voluntary guidelines for responsible companies contributing to the Global Reporting Initiative. UNWTO has also made a number of specific contributions to tourism, including a publication on Tourism and Poverty Alleviation, from which developed, in conjunction with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the special initiative ST-EP (Sustainable Tourism - Elimination of Poverty).

Work has also been carried out in this domain by international NGOs in the fields of culture and nature. The International Charter of Cultural Tourism presented by the International Council of Monuments and Sites outlines principles and guidelines for the management of tourism in places of cultural and heritage significance.

There is no universally accepted definition for the term ecotourism. Most of the definitions highlight a tourism product where the natural environment, local communities and visitors benefit alike. Tour operators also often use the term ecotourism as a marketing tool in order to promote forms of tourism that are related to the enjoyment of nature.

- ✓ According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the term Ecotourism is used to mean the forms or typologies of tourism that have the following characteristics:
 - *When the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature, as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas;*
 - *When it contains educational and interpretation resources;*
 - *When it is usually, but not exclusively, organized by tour operators specializing in small groups and when suppliers of ecotourism services in the destination tend to be small, mostly local, businesses;*

- *When there is readiness to minimize negative impacts on the natural, social and cultural environment;*
- *When it supports the conservation and maintenance of natural areas;*
- *When it generates economic benefits for host communities, organizations and natural area management authorities;*
- *When it provides employment alternatives and business opportunities to local communities;*
- *When it raises awareness to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, both for local populations and for tourists.*

The network of protected areas can be the basis for ecotourism or nature tourism in SKN. PAs in SKN can encompass a range of opportunities for wildlife and biodiversity observation, such as turtles, birds or endemic plants, or for viewing and enjoying extensive natural or semi-natural landscapes, greatly enhanced by the geodiversity of the Federation.

SKN PAs can also provide key areas for the development of low-impact recreation activities, both active and passive, provided they are performed responsibly, in appropriate locations and at appropriate times of the year.

The Protected Areas, delimited and classified by the government, can be a guarantee for the tourism sector, as they assure investors and tour operators that the natural resource (main attraction) is not in danger of degradation. However, it is important to note that the economic development of the segment in these areas is interdependent with a number of related factors, such as accommodation, access and signaling, quality of guide services, ability to actively incorporate local people, etc. Recognizing the importance of the protection of the natural resource's quality is a priority.

Tourism depends heavily on maintaining a high quality environment. This becomes essential to sustain the SKN economy, as well as the benefits achieved or to be achieved.

- ✓ Check the **impacts** on sustainability:

Economic positive consequences

Export services
 Currency entrance
 Creation of jobs
 Promotion of investments in infrastructure
 Increase in local production
 Increase in tax revenues

Economic negative consequences

Economic dependence on tourism activities and seasonal jobs
 Heavy infrastructures

Sociocultural Positives

Promotion of cultural exchanges

Reinforcement of intra-Community links
Tourism investments benefit local populations
Increase in professional qualification

Sociocultural Negatives

Increased in crime, drugs, prostitution and the importation of diseases
Cultural deterioration and loss of traditional values
Cultural shock
Conflicts in the use of space

Environmental Positive

Direct and indirect contribution to the protection of natural resources
Improved management of natural resources

Environmental Negatives

Degradation of natural resources (eg water, soils, and local resources)
Increased waste and pollution risks (in atmosphere, water, soil, etc.)
Physical impacts of infrastructure construction and degradation of habitats

The interest revealed throughout the world in the development of tourism in small islands, has focused the debate on the vulnerability of the islands, and the appeal to reduce the economic dependence on tourism, adopting approaches shaped by the principles of sustainable development.

It must therefore be borne in mind that the effectiveness of any management plan or program depends not only on its coherence and internal logic, but also on its acceptance and the commitment of all those involved.

It is important to mention that ecotourism and its viability and financial return is relatively slow. At every stage of the process and the phases required to implement ecotourism, financial results and returns do not always come quickly.

Procedures

Check that Nature tourism/ecotourism follows the overall objectives:

Step 1: Ensure that it is associated with the protection, conservation and enhancement of the PA;

Step 2: Ensure that proposed infrastructures support and improve information, promotion and maintenance of the PA;

Step 3: The organization of programs and events boosts the improvement of the population's and citizens' quality of life;

Step 4: There is management partnerships with the PA and other interested parties.

To achieve these goals follow the procedures:

Step 5: Ensure that initiatives or projects that propose activities, services and facilities of environmental animation and nature tourism require a permit-license issued by the PA authority;

Step 6: In some cases, carrying capacities must be applied, depending on zones and number of people doing those activities. Take into account that the carrying capacity is defined by the fragility of the ecosystem and habitat to be used. Also take into account private landowners, and always ask applicants for right of passage and use of the land.

Step 7: Ensure that the specified procedures are followed, understood and stimulated:

- a) The protection and conservation of natural resources, landscape, geodiversity, biodiversity, but also agrodiversity and local culture, without which there will be no ecotourism or nature tourism;
- b) The compatibility of nature tourism with the ecological and cultural aspects of each area, respecting their load capacities;
- c) The promotion of public and /or private projects and actions contributing to the adequate visitation of the PA/MPA through the creation of infrastructures, equipment, products and environmentally friendly services;
- d) The promotion or conversion of existing cultural, real estate and immaterial heritage areas that may be recognized and compatible with nature tourism;
- e) The creation of infrastructural and technical conditions that meet the requirements of a quality visitation; namely reception and interpretation centers, eco-museums, oceanographic museums, among others.
- f) Organized-event activities involving the use of motorized vehicles, mountain bikes or similar vehicles in an area, or manner, in which they are otherwise not generally permitted, will require an event permit;
- g) Adequate signaling of nature tourism functions, information, interpretation and sightseeing;
- h) Activities that contribute to awareness-raising, cultural and environmental education of visitors and population;
- i) Encourage the creation of micro and small enterprises, particularly endogenous initiatives that promote local development and close relations between population and tourists;
- j) Encourage the emergence of new professions and activities that show attractive economic conditions for youth employment;
- k) Elimination of constraints and difficulties for private agents so that they may idealize market and manage value-added ecotourism products;
- l) Promote activities that contribute to the dissemination and interpretation of natural, scenic heritage and cultural aspects of PAs;
- m) Promote the commercialization of defining local based products, namely through gastronomy;
- n) The provision of services of public interest, such as environmental education programs, increased in scientific knowledge, programs to support local communities;
- o) Disseminate intangible cultural heritage and cultural identity of the populations;
- p) Promotion of publicity and awareness actions in environmental cooperation with local, regional and national actors;

- q) Construction or rehabilitation of support infrastructures associated with nature tourism, in particular signals, observation infrastructures, visitation and visitor's support units, thematic routes and treks, information, communication and dissemination media;
- r) Creation, updating and maintenance of the interactive PAs portal, as well as significant effort on APPs and virtual information systems.

Also, take notice of the following **best practices**:

- a) Construction methods must have minimal impact, blend into the landscape and follow the previous SOP on building construction
- b) Energy, water supply and waste systems must promote the conservation of resources without spoiling the environment;
- c) The natural and cultural values must be made known and unique elements highlighted. Any constraints or stressors on the system must be identified, and the development and activities on sensitive and vulnerable areas must be avoided;
- d) The ecotourism activities minimize their carbon footprint on the PA;
- e) The Ecotourism operator must contribute to protect and positively enhance the protection and promotion of the PAs, while working in partnership with PA management;
- f) By passing a clear and supportive message, ecotourism activities should encourage visitors to appreciate and protect the PA;

When analyzing a nature tourism activity, plan, project, operation or event you should check the potential impacts, such as:

- Impacts on people, health, fauna and flora, noise and vibration, hydrology, cultural heritage, among others;
- And the nature of these potential impacts, such as duration and probability.

So, check the following:

- a) That natural values and cultural values are taken into consideration and species and habitats listed;
- b) The amount and foreseen impacts - of implantation of constructions, operations or events on the PA zoning and natural values. When they exist, check if there is adequate mitigation;
- c) That landscape features are reflected in the integration and design through scale, form, color and texture, materials and good architecture of the ecotourism facility;
- d) That maintenance is foreseen and that it is preferentially self-sustained with the use of recycled materials, efficient water and energy systems and waste minimization practices;
- e) That in the construction phase, the development impact in surrounding areas is minimized and waste streams are managed during construction through re-use or recycling;
- f) If there is energy conservation and efficiency awareness in the project or event;
- g) If water systems to be used comprehend rainwater tanks, onsite recycling of water/wastewater, swales and bio-retention basins for water treatment and water efficient appliances be considered;

- h) That the project or event provide on-site waste management facilities for processing reusable and recyclable resources, ensuring that hazardous wastes are not released freely;
- i) That a commitment or partnering management with PA authority is envisaged to ensure that stakeholders and right owners deliver shared results;
- j) That employment and training opportunities are presented and provided;
- k) That there are educational opportunities and programs being prepared directly related with the islands, the PA and its scientific, natural and cultural values;

When analyzing, there are alternatives and mitigation measures that should be considered and that you should ask for. These include:

- a) Measures to conserve or reduce wastage of resources
- b) Waste disposal arrangements including recycling, recovery, reuse and final disposal
- c) Pollution controls
- d) Timetable for construction, operation and decommissioning including any phasing of the project
- e) Access arrangements and routes for traffic to and from the site
- f) Environmental management responsibilities and procedures
- g) Monitoring and contingency plans
- h) Decommissioning arrangements, site restoration and after-use
- i) Do Nothing or do Minimum

- ✓ **Note 1:** You may get to the conclusion that depending on the dimension and foreseen impacts that an Environmental Impact Assessment must be asked.
- ✓ **Note 2:** See also SOP#2

Safety code and best practices for visitors in PAs

(adapted from web site of the Department of Parks and Wildlife, Western Australia)

If you plan and prepare before you go to a PA, it will hopefully be an enjoyable experience and you can create some beautiful memories. So be aware that:

- **You do need to take some precautions in the natural environment.** You don't have to go far before you can be on an isolated track, the weather changes or you encounter wildlife. You need to be aware of the risks and take responsibility for your own safety and the safety of anyone else, including children, in your care.
- **If urgent emergency assistance** is required, emergency services may be contacted by phone on the following numbers:
 - SKN primary emergency services number that can be dialed from any fixed or mobile phone, payphone or some Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services
 - 112 is the international standard secondary emergency services number that may be used from digital mobile phones only.
 - Remember technology coverage is not reliable in many PAs. Mobile phone coverage may be better from the top of hills.

Whenever you are in Protected Areas, it is always advisable to stay on existing tracks. If you get lost, stay where you are. You'll be found sooner if you don't stray from tracks

- Know the park and know the conditions of the park before you go. Use web to research your trip
- Contact the local Parks rangers and/or services for up-to-date track conditions, river or creek water levels and fire danger. Web search the meteo and weather conditions in the area before you leave.
- Tell a trusted and responsible person where you are going, what you are doing and when you expect to return. Discuss with them what they should do if you are overdue or do not return when you said you would.
- Register your trip, for instance on [Trailnote](#), or other similar APP so that if anything goes wrong, people will be alerted, and know where and how to find you.

There will be times when, in the interests of visitor safety and environmental protection, Protected Areas are closed or have restricted access.

This could be because of:

- Floods, wildfires or another natural disasters and the aftermath of these events.
- Maintenance and facility development works and visitor safety works.
- Management works including pest control operations and land rehabilitation.

For up-to-date information, also contact the authorities closest to your destination and observe road closure signs and directions

- **Be aware of your own capabilities: your skills, experience and fitness.**

Can you carry enough water to sustain you? Can you navigate by paper map if or when your GPS stops working? Do you know how a high temperature and high humidity affects you? In case you get lost will you find your way easily? These are questions you may need to ask yourself about your capabilities.

If you are part of a group, make sure all participants in the group are also able and prepared. Make sure there's at least one experienced person in the group who can guide and assist others during the activity and in case of an emergency. Allow plenty of time to finish the activity in daylight.

Be prepared for unexpected changes in weather during the day. Avoid sunburn by wearing a hat, shirt and sunscreen, even on overcast days. .

Ensure your equipment is appropriate, in good condition and that you know how to use it. Take if possible essential supplies such as a first aid kit, torch, food and water in case of unexpected delays. Wear sun protection, boots or sturdy footwear and clothing that are weatherproof and scratchproof.

Do not expect to find water supplied. Always carry enough for your own needs. Carry and drink 3 to 4 litres per person per day.

Visitors should always carry a first aid kit and know how to use it.

Mobile phones can be useful but don't rely on them for safety or in an emergency as many parks have limited or no coverage.

- **Hazardous features.**

Examples of hazardous landscape features include falling rocks or slippery surfaces, unstable surfaces that give way underfoot or collapse from above, cliff edges, falling tree limbs or if you're on the coast - tidal surges, large waves, currents and strong winds.

Be very careful around unstable or abandoned structures, and other historic relics. Do not enter or disturb them. Stay on tracks and trails to avoid getting lost.

When walking in the islands tropical forest, trees and limbs may fall unpredictably and without warning, but the risk is higher during and after high winds and storms. To minimize the risk of injury stay well away from trees that appears to be dead or have dead limbs.

The vast majority of animal encounters on land or in the water are safe if you treat them respect and avoid approaching or feeding any wildlife.

If an animal feels trapped, it may try to protect itself. If you feel threatened by an animal stay calm, keep an eye on where it is, back away, do not run. Some animals in some circumstances may react to your behavior in particular ways. Research the types of animals you may encounter on your travels and their behavior.

- **Ticks and insects.**

Protect yourself from bites and stings by wearing long, loose, light-colored clothing (the same clothing that will help protect you from the sun) and using insect repellents when needed, available for the skin, clothes and camping gear.

Most marine animals are harmful, but they may bite, sting or have sharp spines. Take heed of any warning signs and tread carefully when going into the water. Consider wearing booties or reef shoes when walking in the water and fins and gloves when snorkeling.

- **Walk safely:**

- Walk in groups of three or more – in an emergency one might need to wait with the injured person while someone goes for help. Always walk to the pace of the slowest person in your group.
- Stay on the trail. If you get lost stay where you are. You'll be found sooner if you don't stray from the trail.
- Protect yourself. Wear a hat and loose protective clothing, drink 3 to 4 liters of water per day when walking and walk in the cooler times of the day.

- **Adventure sports like climbing, caving, orienteering, waterskiing, paddling, kayaking, Hang gliding, free flight, mountain biking** offer a thrilling opportunity to explore unique environments. Adventure sports however involve inherent risks. Careful research and planning, competent leadership, organization, proper provisioning, skills and equipment are essential. We strongly recommend that you head out under the guidance of a suitable group, club or nature tourism company.

If you are new to an activity, first build your skills, knowledge and experience. Why not take part in a commercial tour to enjoy the activity with other people. We advise you take part in any adventure activity in a group of at least three people. If one person is injured, another person may need to stay with them while someone goes for help.

Take responsibility for your own safety and have an emergency response plan. Only participate in activities where all members of the party have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to participate safely. The leader should not only be able to get you there, they should also be able to get you out of the park in an event of an emergency.

Know your proposed route and stick to it. Have adequate food, water, safety and first aid gear, maps and navigation equipment and clothing for all contingencies. Tell a trusted and responsible person where you are going, what you are doing and when you expect to return. Discuss with them what they should do if you are overdue.

- Permission may be needed for some activities, see SOP #2 and 3.

- **Driving in the PAs**

Many PAs and recreation areas are only accessible by gravel or dirt roads (apart from the Central Forest Reserve that has a main parking space in the entry at the Old Road Town, or the

Brimstone Hills Fortress in St.Kitts and some marine areas that can be reached by main roads around the islands).

Some road surfaces may be loose or corrugated, tyres can spin and lose grip, dust may reduce visibility and gravel may be thrown up. When driving these roads, you should reduce your speed, leave extra distance from the vehicle in front and don't brake suddenly.

A number of places are only accessible by roads and tracks that are not suitable for all types of vehicles. Venturing onto these roads is not recommended and many times not allowed. Check first. You need to be adequately experienced, equipped and prepared.

Some experienced hikers seek experiences in remote places without facilities, often in areas that are challenging to access. Remote hikers are generally experienced and self-sufficient.

Check the meteo websites to make sure you are prepared. Take all appropriate equipment and supplies to ensure you are self-sufficient for your journey, including water and first aid supplies.

- **Boating.** Check previously the sites that are suitable for launching boats, mooring areas and restricted boating areas.

Before heading out onto the water, check your boating equipment thoroughly to ensure you have all your safety gear. Your safety equipment may include life jackets, distress beacon, marine radio, transceiver, flares, effective anchor and line, bailer or bilge pump, fresh water, first aid kit, rope, toolkit, torch, signaling mirror, fire extinguisher and alternative power source/spare motor.

Check the weather forecast, tide predictions and be prepared for unexpected changes in the weather. Take the time to plan your trip to make sure it's a safe one. Tell someone where you are going and when you plan to be back.

If you are going to an unfamiliar location, carry a chart of the area you intend go to. Familiarize yourself with the position of navigational markers and potential hazards before you depart.

For information on boating regulations and safety, tide and coastal weather forecasts check the meteo and hydrological sites

Tell a trusted and responsible person where you are going, your point of departure and when you are expected to return.

Ensure your canoe or kayak and equipment are all in good condition and suitable for the location and conditions. Always wear an approved flotation device. Head protection is recommended for white water conditions.

Wear suitable clothing for the conditions and sun protection and make sure you are highly visible to other people, including those in boats.

Paddling conditions vary greatly through the seasons and throughout the day. Winds, tides and currents are important factors especially for ocean and estuary paddling. On inland rivers and lakes, beware of submerged hazards and snags such as logs or tree roots

Snorkel with more people. Never alone. Tell a trusted and responsible person where you are going, your point of departure and when you expect to return.

Ensure you have a correctly fitted mask, snorkel and fins and know how to use them. If you are not a confident swimmer, do not go snorkeling without a suitable flotation device.

Assess the conditions prior to entering the water. Check entry and exit points, waves, currents, visibility and the presence/proximity of boats.

If snorkeling more than 50 meters from shore, or in areas where there may be boat activity, ensure you use an internationally recognized diver's flag.

SCUBA (Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) and surface supplied breathing apparatus (SSBA) diving is a specialized activity that is subject to regulations. See SOP #2.

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