

Sustainable Wildlife Tourism in Asia and the Pacific: future perspectives

Global Eco conference 2020

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Sustainable wildlife tourism

We hear a lot in social media about poor examples of wildlife tourism in Asia – cruel elephant training, mistreatment of animals used for selfies, small cages, inappropriate feeding, crowded venues etc.



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But there also are many examples of good practice, and (as in other world regions) others really wanting to “do the right thing” and to learn how to improve environmental and animal welfare credentials without disappointing visitors or heading for bankruptcy.

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In 2019 the UN's World Tourism Organisation commissioned us to prepare a report on sustainable wildlife tourism in Asia and the Pacific, under the framework of the UNWTO/Chimelong Initiative



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Sustainable wildlife tourism

In 2019 the UNWTO commissioned us to prepare a report on sustainable wildlife tourism in Asia and the Pacific, under the framework of the UNWTO/Chimelong Initiative, focusing on **good practice** examples of **non-consumptive** and primarily **non-captive** wildlife tourism.



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This initially involved consulting with world experts on criteria for selecting good practice examples



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Our expert committee (Australia, Asia, UK and South Africa):

ACADEMIC

Dr. Duan Biggs	Dr. Georgette Leah Burns
Prof. Xavier Font	Mr. Jaime Cavelier
Dr. Lisa Cong	Prof. David Newsome
Prof. John Koldowski	Prof. Mark Orams
Prof. Eric Laws	Dr. Aise Kim
Dr. Jatna Supriatna	Dr. David Macdonald
Dr. Kevin Markwell	Dr. Tom Moorhouse
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PUBLIC SECTOR

Ms. Maria Rica C. Bueno

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Mr. John Edward Roberts
Mr. Albert Teo
Mr. Steve Noakes
Mr. Gary Sundin

NGO

Mr. Rod Hillman
Ms. Rochelle Turner
Dr. Anna Spenceley
Ms. Clare Jenkinson
Mr. Daniel Turner
Ms. Christina Beckmann

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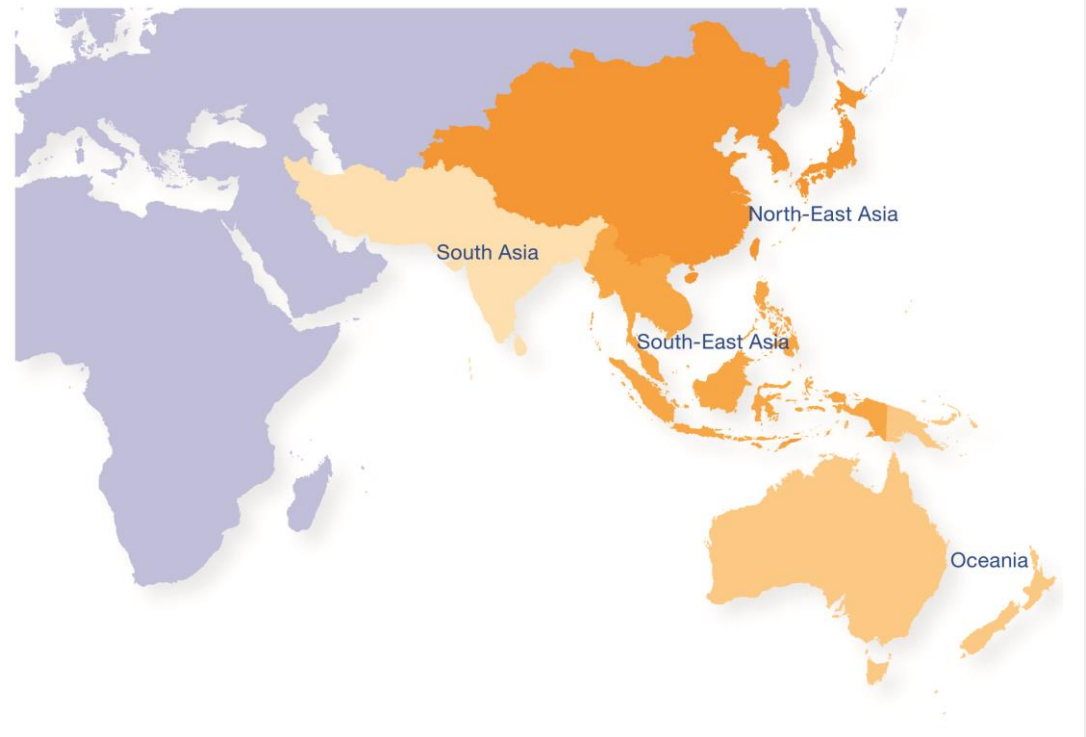
The final criteria included many items grouped under:

- Animal welfare
- Wildlife conservation
- Minimal-impact viewing
- Expertise and training of staff
- Interpretation
- Impact on local communities
- General environmental issues (e.g. waste reduction)
- Research
- Partnerships etc.

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It also involved many hours of internet research, including travel sites, academic and other literature, and consultation with persons involved in tourism wildlife conservation and animal welfare in every country in the region (From Iran and Afghanistan through to Fiji and Samoa).



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We eventually selected eighteen examples spread across a number of countries and types of operation (ecolodges, guided tours, sole traders, multinational companies, government initiatives, and marine and terrestrial habitats)



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The following authors contributed
(in addition to Ronda Green and Noel Scott):

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I'm here presenting a sample of operations showing good-practice, including interpretation, animal welfare, environmental safeguards, biodiversity conservation projects, citizen science and contribution to local community that could well be emulated elsewhere.



Photo: Wildlife of the Mongolian Steppes

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A few examples of good practice

Borneo Eco Tours (Malaysia)

- Very knowledgeable proprietor, comprehensive staff training
- High quality interpretation
- Building research centre
- Employ and train local staff
- Use local foods and other products
- Minimise waste
- Encourage establishment of wildlife corridors in district



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A few examples of good practice

Lady Elliot Island (Australia)

- Very knowledgeable managers and staff
- Revegetated depleted island, now second highest bird diversity in Great Barrier Reef
- Citizen science: coral, manta rays
- Renewable energy (solar)
- Nature trail on climate change
- Partnerships with Qld government and University of Qld



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A few examples of good practice

Rimba Orangutan Lodge (Indonesia)

- Very knowledgeable management
- Hire and train locals
- Support research from Camp Leakey
- Renewable energy (solar)
- Elevated walking platforms (minimise impact)



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A few examples of good practice

Wildlife of the Mongolian Steppe (Mongolia)

- Citizen science – guests are trained to assist with monitoring a variety of wildlife species, and results assist conservation management
- Partner with Earthwatch, Denver Zoo, Argali Research Centre and Ikh NP
- Local staff work alongside international experts
- Give training to local school students

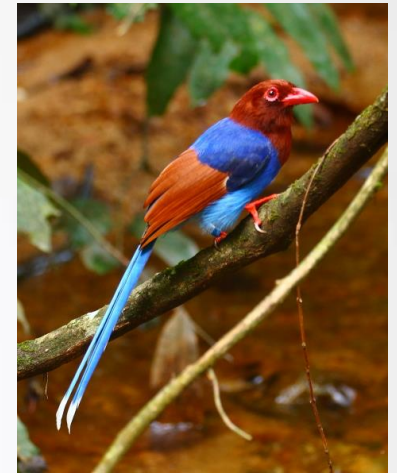


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A few examples of good practice

Aarunya Tour to Sinharaja (Sri Lanka)

- Very knowledgeable proprietor, comprehensive staff training
- High quality interpretation
- Staff conduct research
- Mentor local small businesses
- Train visitors in minimal wildlife disturbance
- Minimise waste
- Conservation projects

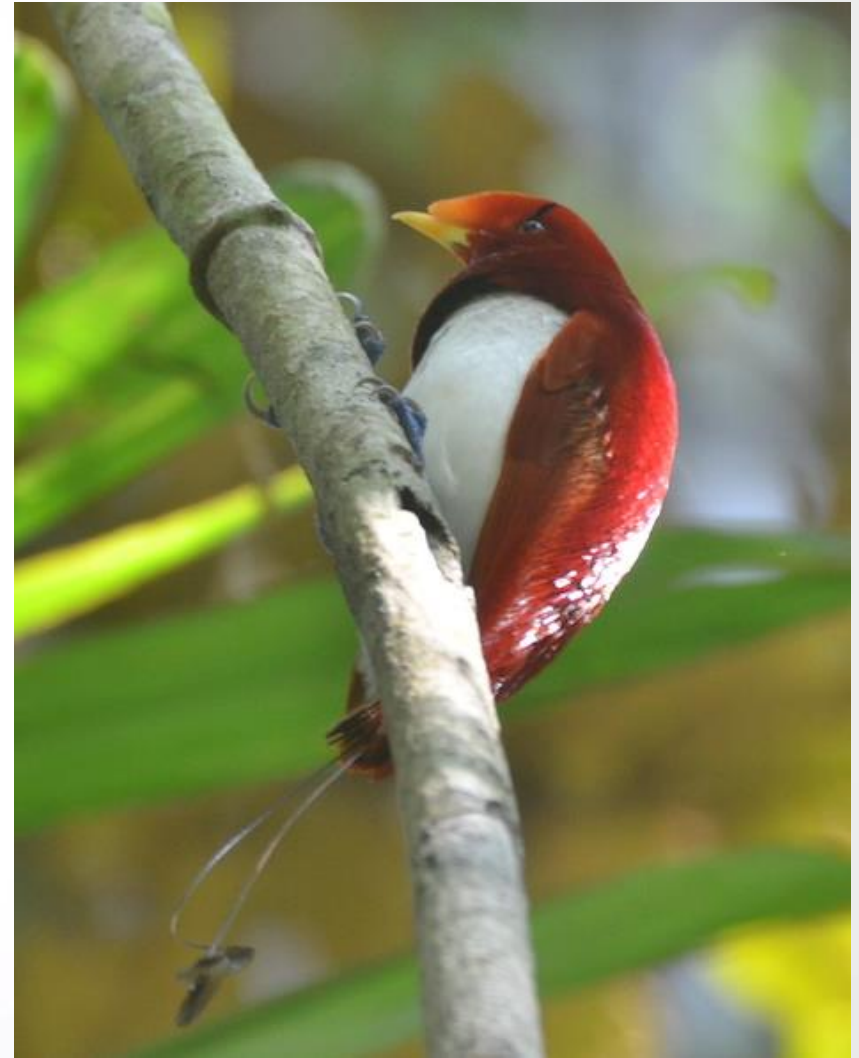


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A few examples of good practice

Other selected operations

- Misool, Raja Ampat (Indonesia)
- Alex Waisimon birding West Papua (Indonesia)
- Sicklebill Safaris (PNG)
- Chengdu Panda Research Centre (China)
- Mangrove Paddleboat Tour (Philippines)
- Mahouts Elephant Foundation (Thailand)
- Big Fish Expeditions (Japan)
- Dongtang Nature Reserve (China)



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A few examples of good practice

Others selected for short notes

- Ulu Ulu Resort (Brunei)
- Augmented Wildlife Viewing (China)
- Spring flowers of Sikkim (India)
- Dinghu Mountain Nature Reserve (China)
- Suncheon Bay Nature Reserve (China)

Sustainable wildlife tourism

A few problems encountered by some tour companies

- Guests expecting New York style accommodation in remote regions
- Poor road access to some regions
- Limited internet
- Real or perceived safety concerns (political unrest, crime rate etc.)
- Lack of translation to other languages
- Lack of government interest in environmental sustainability
- Competition with operations with lower standards but popular appeal
- Negative attitudes of advisers
- Balancing needs of tourists and locals

Sustainable wildlife tourism

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- Poor road access to some regions
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Suggestions

Need to be clear in promotional material what guests should expect (e.g. bumpy roads, no TV or swimming pool, limited mobile access)

Explain reasons for some factors (hiring of locals, some still in training, cutting excessive energy or water use, not changing wildlife behaviour)

Emphasise the great experience that more than makes up for some temporary inconveniences

Sustainable wildlife tourism

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- Lack of government interest in environmental sustainability
- Competition with operations with lower standards but popular appeal
- Negative attitudes of advisers
- Balancing needs of tourists and locals

Suggestions

Do your own research on what's possible, test your ideas, communicate with others of similar interests and goals

Politely educate others, and also try to understand their problems (real or perceived)

Sustainable wildlife tourism

Some gaps in the market

Relative lack of botanical tours compared to other world regions (e.g. Europe, South Africa, s-w Australia)

Much potential

(May be some available but not reaching English/Chinese/German-speaking markets etc.)



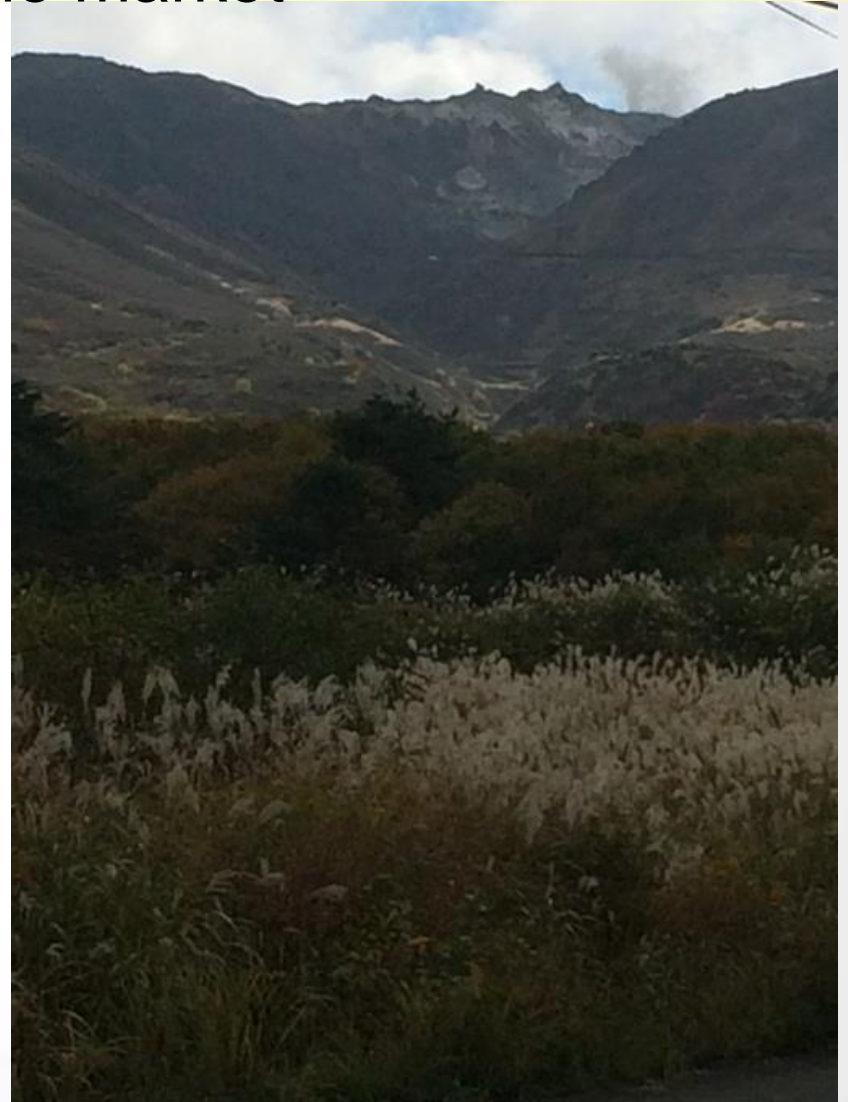
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Some gaps in the market

Lack of online promotion of many natural areas, at least in English

e.g. 2/3 of Japan is forested, and its vegetation extends from sub-arctic to subtropical, rarely mentioned on promotional websites and not realised by many nature-loving tourists



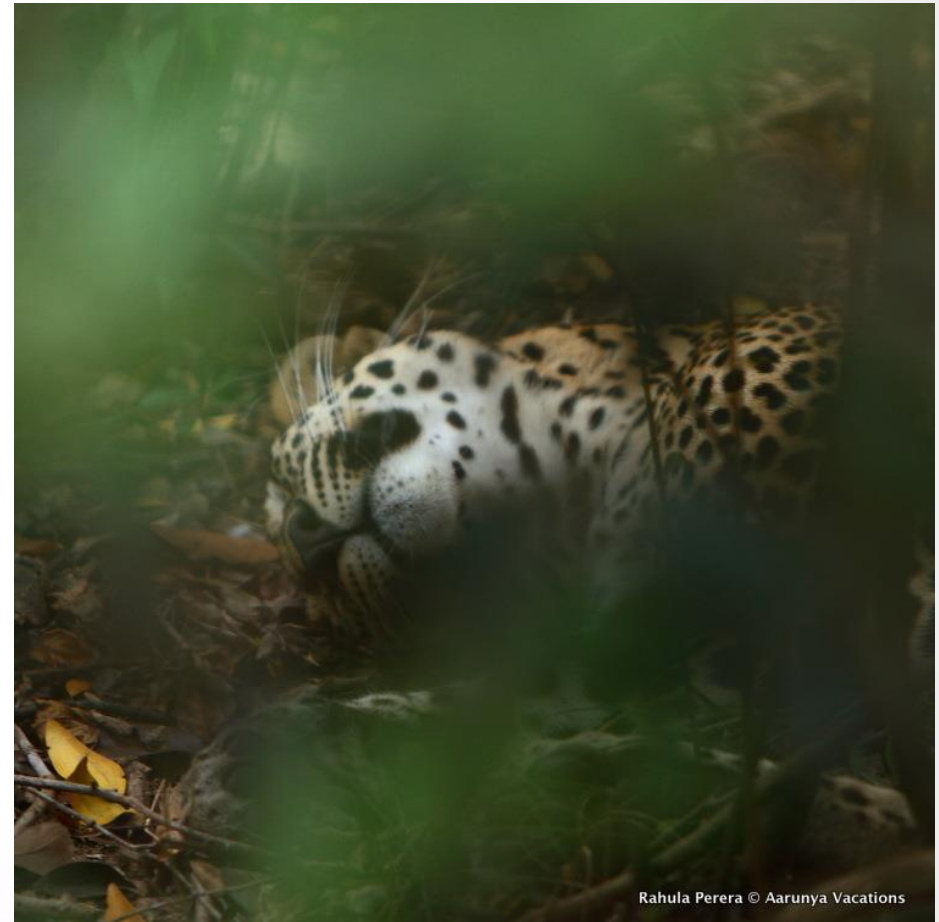
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Some gaps in the market

Lack of online promotion of wildlife tourism or difficulty contacting operators (China, Vietnam, other)

When Australians want to travel to see elephants, rhinos, great apes and big cats, they tend to think of Africa, somehow forgetting Asia has these too



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Some gaps in the market

There is a tremendous wealth of less famous but fascinating creatures in many habitats



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Some gaps in the market

Some countries simply don't offer many wildlife experiences, but could well do so

Wildlife is hard to find in some countries – it would be good for government and tourism to work together on wildlife conservation and destination marketing

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Some gaps in the market

Diving tours often seem to miss opportunities for interpretation of marine wildlife and ecosystems.

Operations offering quality visitor education could stand out from the crowd when marketing to nature enthusiasts



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Some gaps in the market

There are a few good examples of citizen science in tourism (and some not-so-good ones)

There is potential for expanding on good quality experiences

Photos:

- Mongolian Steppes,
- Coralwatch



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A new problem

Downturns in
international travel
(due to Covid-19
lockdown)



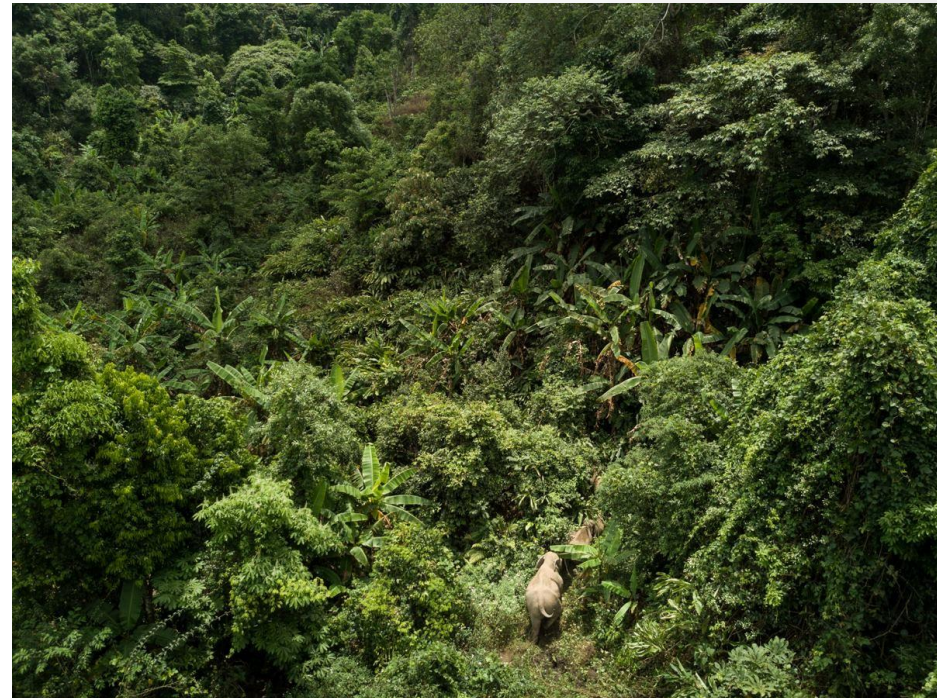
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Coronavirus

Likely effects:

- Less crowding – better experience for nature-loving tourists
- Greater ratio of domestic : international tourists
- “Slow” tourism? (tourists spending relatively more time at each destination instead of multiple short visits.)
- Domestics unable to afford as much as international tourists, but more likely to make repeat visits



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Possibilities for attracting domestic tourists

School groups studying science, environment or geography

Families (“parents - let your kids have fun while learning about our natural heritage”)

Retired couples (“now at last you have time to develop interesting outdoor hobbies or just relax in nature”)

City-dwellers – escape the crowds, discover nature

Citizen science – have a close-up experience, learn a lot and “do good”

Conservation volunteers - ditto



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Many good things happening



Potential for much more!

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Thank you!

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For pdf of UNWTO report:

<https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284421572>
or google “UNWTO wildlife tourism Asia Pacific”

Photos throughout this presentation are our own, the operators or CoralWatch

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