



# Center for Responsible Travel

*Transforming the Way the World Travels*

Stanford University & Washington, DC

[www.responsibletravel.org](http://www.responsibletravel.org)

## Project Fact Sheet: Mitigating Impacts of Coastal Tourism Development

Over the last decade, the rapid pace of resort, vacation home, and cruise-related developments along coastlines and islands has brought a number of benefits but also contributed to serious environmental and social problems. In many places, this powerful development phenomenon is destroying critical habitat for myriad endemic species and drastically altering local communities; CREST has made mitigating the negative impacts of coastal tourism development a strategic focus.

### What is the issue?

Government leaders around the world have spotted the potential of coastal zones to attract foreign investment, create jobs, and grow tax revenue through tourism development. Private sector entrepreneurs, meanwhile, have picked up on growing consumer demand for beach holidays to relieve the stress of modern life. All around, the two groups are working independently and teaming up to convert wild coastlines into urbanized tourism destinations.



Coastal zones (marshes, mangrove stands, seagrass beds, beaches and littoral forests) are especially sensitive because they play a unique role in the global ecosystem – nurturing terrestrial, marine and avian species alike. These areas are under intense pressure, however, from tourism-related development. The small coastal communities in these zones were mostly formed around artisanal fishing, agriculture, and trade, but they too are under pressure.

CREST research has revealed that this development is frequently pursued without full knowledge of the true impacts – economic, environmental, and social – it has on destinations. The economic benefits of certain models of tourism are often overstated, and the environmental and social costs remain unquantified; conventional coastal tourism is pursued vigorously nonetheless.

### What are we doing about it?

CREST provides public and private sector leaders with the information they need to make informed development decisions. Using rigorous research methodologies, CREST has produced a series of studies, films and symposia that illuminate the impacts of coastal tourism development and offer policy recommendations to minimize the negative effects and maximize the positive benefits. They include:

- **“Global Trends in Coastal Tourism Development”** – CREST helped WWF’s global marine program understand this issue and identify interventions that ‘put the weight of the panda’ behind solutions. Our study formed the basis of WWF’s global approach to tourism.
- **Cruise Tourism in Belize, Costa Rica, & Honduras** – For the Inter-American Development Bank and Belize Tourism Board, CREST examined this sector and made policy recommendations that have been picked up by the Bank and across Central America.
- **Coastal Tourism Development along Costa Rica’s Pacific Coast** – CREST’s intensive study of sun & sand tourism undermining Costa Rica’s ecotourism reputation includes a set of policy recommendations being carefully weighed by key stakeholders.
- **Documentary Film** – CREST commissioned a documentary film “Cracking the Golden Egg” to illustrate the challenges of conventional coastal tourism in Costa Rica to a wide audience.
- **Innovator’s Symposium** – CREST gathered 85 industry ‘thought-leaders’ and pioneers who are breaking the mold of cookie-cutter hotels, and forging new, sustainable, approaches to coastal tourism development. The newly-formed bloc is driving change from within the industry.

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