



**Center for Responsible Travel**  
Washington, DC and Stanford University  
*Transforming the Way the World Travels*

## **Tourism: Preventing Conflict, Promoting Peace**

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Tourism has been hailed as “the global peace industry,” and, it is frequently implied, there is a natural link between tourism and peace. In 1929, for instance, the British Travel and Holidays Association declared “Travel for Peace” as the theme of its inaugural meeting. In 1967, the UN’s International Tourism Year adopted as its slogan, “Tourism: Passport to Peace.” In 1986, the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IITP) was founded, and two years later organized its first global conference, entitled “Tourism: A Vital Force for Peace.”<sup>i</sup> And, at the 2008 Travelers Philanthropy Conference in Tanzania, Nobel Laureate and founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, Wangari Maathai, declared in her keynote address, “Tourism can be a great vehicle for peace promotion.”

While tourism and peace have often been linked, the connection is not guaranteed. As these case studies on India, Nigeria and Kenya demonstrate, creating the connection between tourism and peace requires that the conditions on both sides of the equation be right: peace must be more than an absence of conflict, and tourism must be crafted so that it truly benefits local communities and the environment.

These essays were written by three of the 225 delegates who participated in the 2008 Travelers’ Philanthropy Conference held in Arusha, Tanzania, December 3-5, 2008. The conference, the largest ever held on this topic, examined the rapidly growing trend of initiatives supported by tourism companies and travelers to ‘give back’ to social and conservation projects in the host communities where tourism takes place. Through the term is less than a decade old, travelers’ philanthropy is an increasingly important form of assistance generated from tourism, and it is increasingly recognized as one of the core components of responsible travel. It is *responsible tourism*, not simply conventional or mass tourism that holds the potential to prevent conflict and promote peace.

Before exploring this theme further, we need to understand why tourism matters. Tourism is widely said to be the world’s largest business sector, accounting for one in twelve people globally.<sup>ii</sup> In 4 out of 5 countries (over 150) tourism is one of five top export earners. In 60 countries it is the number one export.<sup>iii</sup> International tourist arrivals have grown enormously over the last half century, from 25 million in 1950 to 898 million arrivals in 2007.<sup>iv</sup> This trend is likely

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to continue even with the current global economic crisis. By 2020, tourist arrivals are projected to reach 1.6 billion.<sup>v</sup>

In addition, tourism is especially important to poor countries around the world. It is a principle “export” (foreign exchange earner) for 83% of developing countries, and the leading export for 1/3 of poorest countries.<sup>vi</sup> For the world’s 40 poorest countries, tourism is the second most important source of foreign exchange, after oil.<sup>vii</sup> In recent years, tourism has been “the only large sector of international trade in services where poor countries have consistently posted a surplus.”<sup>viii</sup> As the Secretary-General of the UN’s World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Francesco Frangialli stated, “While mature markets [in Europe and North America] remain the leading destinations in the world, the faster growth rate of new markets confirms UNWTO’s main message of tourism’s potential for the developing world.”<sup>ix</sup>

While tourism has been growing more rapidly in developing countries, the question— as these essays reflect – is whether it can contribute to the building blocs for peace: social justice, economic equity, sustainable development, and broad based democracy. This is not a new question. When I was a graduate student at the University of Dar-es-Salaam back in the 1970s, there was a heated national debate about whether international tourism was really a tool for development. Many in what was then a non-aligned socialist country argued “no”, and Tanzania proceeded to cautiously build a small, largely state-run tourism sector.

Tanzania was not alone. By the late 1970s, a number of poor countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia were complaining that they were gaining little more than low paying jobs from the type of tourism projects being promoted by international lending agencies like the World Bank. They pointed out that most of the profits did not stay in their countries and instead tourism often left in its wake social and environmental problems including prostitution, black marketeering, cultural degradation, and infectious diseases. In response to these criticisms, the World Bank closed its tourism department in 1979 and, for a period, stopped lending for tourism projects.<sup>x</sup>

Spurred by these complaints and inspired by the global environmental movement that took hold in the 1970s, experiments began in various parts of the world to create types of tourism that were less damaging to both nature and local people. During the 1980s, these experiments had coalesced into a new movement know as ecotourism. By the early 1990s, ecotourism was the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry. In 2002, the United Nations declared the International Year of Ecotourism, signifying that it had achieved importance in many countries. Today, ecotourism is said to be growing three times faster than the tourism industry as a whole.<sup>xi</sup>

In 1990, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) was founded and the first chair of its board was a highly respected conservationist, David Western, author of the paper here on Kenya. Western and his colleagues hammered out what is still today the most frequently quoted definition of ecotourism: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”<sup>xii</sup>

Ecotourism now offers a clear alternative model to mass or conventional tourism. A number of countries, including Costa Rica, Belize, Ecuador, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, and

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Nepal, to name a few, have proclaimed they are building their tourism industry based on the principles of ecotourism; some have also created certification programs to measure the social and environmental impacts of tourism businesses. Most lending by the World Bank, IDB, and other aid agencies is done under the umbrella of eco- or sustainable tourism. And we've seen the introduction of a number of new terms. – geotourism, pro-poor tourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, and so forth – all of which are simply variants on the basic definition of ecotourism. (See Typology of Tourism Terms)

Despite these enormous advances since the 1970s, most tourism today continues to the conventional variety aimed at a mass market. Therefore tourism debates – and real life struggles around tourism -- continue, as Aditii Chanchani's essay on tourism in India describes. What Chanchani argues is that tourism developments that come in from the outside without respecting and working with the local communities can exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts; they can also give rise to new injustices, inequities, and conflicts. Chanchani is with the non-profit advocacy organization EQUATIONS based in Bangalore that, since 1985, has been working closely with communities impacted by tourism. She writes, "While the Indian government touts tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation, sustainable development, and social stability, in reality tourism rarely alleviates socio-economic inequalities and injustices." Chanchani concludes, "Certainly, tourism can contribute to peace, but for this to be possible, one must engage with...the aspirations of those in the places that are being visited."<sup>xiii</sup>

In addition, we have seen in India and elsewhere that tourism locales can become high profile targets for terrorism. The November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai captured headlines around the world because one of its targets was the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, a famous landmark for international business and vacation travelers. The accompanying chart lists a number of other instances over the last decade where international tourism has been targeted by terrorists attempting to focus global attention on their grievances.

While the India essay demonstrates that conventional tourism does not automatically bring peace, and in fact, frequently heightens conflict, the one on Nigeria illustrates that the reverse of this equation is true: *peace is a precondition for tourism*. Perhaps no country demonstrates this more clearly than Costa Rica. In the early 1980s, as Costa Rica and other countries in Central America were wracked by civil conflicts and Cold War contests, international tourism was miniscule. However, in 1988, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias successfully negotiated the Central American Peace Plan which ended the region's wars and won him the Nobel Peace Prize. Virtually overnight tourism – in the form of ecotourism – took off in Costa Rica and by 1992, Costa Rica was hailed as the world's leading ecotourism destination.<sup>xiv</sup> Peace was the prerequisite, but Costa Rica also had other important ingredients that made high quality, nature-based ecotourism possible. These included a large system of national parks; well functioning democratic institutions; no military (Costa Rica abolished its army in 1948); strong social institutions including universal education and health care; good infrastructure; and proximity to the U.S. tourism market. But it was peace that tipped the balance and turned Costa Rica from a staging ground for the US war against Nicaragua to the poster child of ecotourism.

Bola Adeleke, a professor of tourism at Redeemer's University located in oil rich and conflict-ridden Nigeria, also argues that peace is necessary before tourism can grow. She writes that Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with a wealth of natural and cultural attractions, has a huge potential to develop international tourism. And, she contends, tourism, responsibly done, could be a better tool for sustainable development than oil. "However," Adeleke says that "ongoing political instability and a string of military dictatorships have meant that developing a tourism industry was largely neglected." Even though the return of a democratically elected civilian government in 1999 "helped to build investor and traveler confidence, Nigeria continues to suffer from internal instabilities."

Adeleke goes on to state that "for tourism to grow and contribute positively to poverty reduction and cultural and environmental protection, Nigeria needs to curb political instability, crime, and ethnic disputes." She concludes, "As elsewhere, tourism needs a foundation of political and social stability in order to grow. Peace, therefore, is a primary prerequisite for tourism – while, in turn, socially and environmentally responsible tourism helps to foster stability, economic equity, and, ultimately, a more peaceful society."

It is these themes that David Western's essay builds upon in his sophisticated analysis of Kenya's tourism industry. Western brings to this essay and his other writings a half century experience as a conservationist studying the interactions between local people, game parks, and tourism. He is, as well, the former director of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), and a founder of both The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and the Nairobi-based Africa Conservation Centre (ACC).

Tourism is Kenya's most important foreign exchange earner and Kenya ranks #2 in sub-Saharan Africa (behind South Africa) in international tourism arrivals. In contrast, Nigeria, despite being Africa's largest country, doesn't even rank among the top 17 sub-Saharan African countries. India, the world's second most populous country (after China) and a country undergoing rapid economic development, ranks globally a paltry 42 in international tourism arrivals.<sup>xv</sup>

Western traces the arc of tourism in Kenya, from the creation of the national parks in the early 20th century; to the growth of tourism dominated through the 1980s by big international corporations; to ecotourism and community run conservancies in the 1990s; and to, most recently, travelers' philanthropy. Western writes that Kenya has been "an exemplar of the best and the worst in ecotourism." Like India and Nigeria, its tourism has suffered from political unrest, corruption, terrorist attacks (including the 1998 bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi and the 2002 attack on an Israeli-owned coastal resort, north of Mombasa), and laissez-faire government policies that "invite rash development and culturally demeaning practices."

Yet over the years, Kenya's safari tourism has evolved and matured, in part based on the principles and good practices of ecotourism. Kenya was the first country in Africa to form an ecotourism society, the first to create a certification program to measure the social and environmental impacts of hotels, and among the first to actively promote domestic tourism by slashing national park entrance fees for Kenyan citizens. Through its "Parks Beyond Parks" program, initiated by Western while he was KWS director, Kenya pioneered community-run

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wildlife conservancies. As Western writes, this program “spread the benefits, spread the load, and made local communities central in tourism rather than peripheral to parks.” He continues, “Since the 1990s, several thousand square kilometers of conservancies have been established, hundreds of community scouts have been trained and deployed, and dozens of ecotourism lodges and business enterprises have sprung up all over Kenya.” Today Kenya is a recognized global leader in community-based conservation and ecotourism, particularly in the areas around the national parks.

While not addressing explicitly the role of tourism in promoting peace, and vice versa, Western describes how ecotourism together with community conservancies, wildlife associations, and travelers’ philanthropy, is helping to protect biodiversity, provide skills and good jobs to local communities, enhance local cultures, build good governance, and repair Kenya’s tarnished tourism image. These are, in essence, the building blocs for peace and stability.

And, Western goes on to argue that ecotourism and travelers’ philanthropy may even be able to help address our most pressing global problem: climate change. He says that the only way the “great wildlife herds [will] withstand encirclement [of human settlements] and climate change” is if the national parks in Kenya and Tanzania are surrounded by large land associations that can “buffer wildlife from climate change.” He argues that “it will take collaboration between landowner association, conservationists, ecotourists and the philanthropist to pull it off.”

Western argues that Kenya’s successful ecotourism model has been driven by the travelers, not the tourism industry or the government. Through his essay, Western weaves the Biblical image of the Good Samaritan. He begins by asking, “How do we translate ancient Good Samaritanism into travelers’ philanthropy for good of people and nature along the road?” And he concludes, at the end, “I am cautiously optimistic that [travelers’ philanthropy] has a new and vital role to play, if done thoughtfully. The extra money and support philanthropy brings could spell the difference between community-based conservation success and failure....The challenges for travelers’ philanthropy is to be a Good Samaritan.”

Travelers’ philanthropy has therefore become another of the building blocks that work to ensure that tourism promotes peace. As these case studies illustrate, while peace is clearly a precondition for tourism, the reverse is more complicated. Tourism promotes peace only when it is done in ways that involve and benefit the destination. Fortunately today, in contrast with 30 years ago, we have the tools for ensuring that tourism adheres to the social and environmental principles and practices first laid out through ecotourism.

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journalist based in Tanzania and Costa Rica, and holds a Ph.D. in African history. She was executive director of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) from 2003 to 2006.

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<sup>i</sup> "Tourism: The Global Peace Industry," *World and I: Innovative Approaches to Peace*, summer 2007, pp. 66-75.

<sup>ii</sup> Mintel Report. "Eco and Ethical Tourism-UK", October 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> World Tourism Organization, "Tourism, a Force for Sustainable Development," 19<sup>th</sup> OSCE Economic Forum, Prague, Czech Republic, June 2, 2004.

<sup>iv</sup> UNWTO, *World Tourism Barometer*, 2008,

<http://www.mpiweb.org/cms/mpiweb/blog/commonblog.aspx?Viewblog=2060&groupblog=2>.

<sup>v</sup> Mintel Report. "Eco and Ethical Tourism-UK", October 2003; World Travel and Tourism Council, *Travel & Tourism Forging Ahead: Executive Summary* (London, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>vi</sup> Lisa Mastny, *Treading Lightly: New Paths for International Tourism*, Worldwatch Paper 159 (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, December 2001), p. 15.

<sup>vii</sup> Mastny, *Treading Lightly*, p. 37.

<sup>viii</sup> UN Council on Trade and Development, quoted in Patricia Goldstone, *Making the World Safe for Tourism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 46.

<sup>ix</sup> Quoted in "Update on Tourism Statistics: International Scene,"

[http://www.tourism.go.ke/ministry.nsf/doc/Facts%20&%20figures%202007.pdf/\\$file/Facts%20&%20figures%202007.pdf](http://www.tourism.go.ke/ministry.nsf/doc/Facts%20&%20figures%202007.pdf/$file/Facts%20&%20figures%202007.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> Martha Honey, *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?* Island Press, 2008, pp. 17-23.

<sup>xi</sup> Honey, *Who Owns Paradise*, 2008.

<sup>xii</sup> The International Ecotourism Society, [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org).

<sup>xiii</sup> There are some excellent examples in India of ecotourism that does strive to meet the aspirations and the needs of the local communities. Two such companies took part in the Travelers' Philanthropy Conference. One is a Scandinavian company called Basecamp Explorer which offers ecotourism in Rajasthan and in Dharamsala where it opened in 2008 the House of Peace and Dialogue which is connected to the Tibetan Children's Village, [www.basecampexplorer.com](http://www.basecampexplorer.com). The other is The Blue Yonder which is owned by Gopinath Parayil and specializes in cultural and community tourism in Kerala, [www.theblueyonder.com](http://www.theblueyonder.com). Both these companies have set up exemplary travelers' philanthropy projects and have won international responsible tourism awards.

<sup>xiv</sup> Honey, *Who Owns Paradise?*, 2008.

<sup>xv</sup> UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Vol. 6, No. 2, June

2008, [http://www.tourismroi.com/Content Attachments/27670/File\\_633513750035785076.pdf](http://www.tourismroi.com/Content Attachments/27670/File_633513750035785076.pdf).

Interestingly, India ranks 20th globally in revenue from tourism, undoubtedly an indication that their internal or domestic tourism is strong.