



The MAB Programme and Ecotourism



Tracking the path of sustainable tourism

The UN has declared year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) with the purpose to review ecotourism experiences around the world, in order to consolidate tools and institutional frameworks that ensure its sustainable future development.

The UNESCO MAB Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves seek to help guide tourism towards a more sustainable path.

We do this through promoting international, regional and local initiatives in partnership with other UN bodies, international organizations, Member States, the private sector, NGOs, local communities and academia.

Biosphere reserves are sites established by countries participating in the MAB Programme to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable development based on local community efforts and sound science. They are ideal places to test and develop innovative tourism models that benefit local people and maintain cultures, biodiversity and associated values.

In addition, you are also sure to find some of the most enriching experiences in ecotourism in the 409 Biosphere Reserves in 94 countries that constitute the WNBR.

Using the World Network of Biosphere Reserves

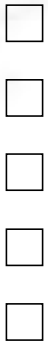
to solve

the ecotourism equation:

$Tourists + Biodiversity + Culture + ? = Ecotourism$

Following several decades of rapid growth, the tourism sector is of increasing interest in sustainable development discussions. By its very nature, tourism is ambivalent – generating well-known advantages but also problems.

By often targeting fragile ecosystems and local, traditional cultures, the ecotourism industry is of course a particularly challenging case in this context – the main reason why the UN has declared the International Year of Ecotourism 2002. Although the actual or potential benefits and disadvantages from tourism are becoming fairly well documented, there is no consensus internationally on how to best optimize the long-term net tourism benefits. It is the objective of the MAB Programme to contribute to such a consensus through dedicated international co-operation and networking.



With 409 Biosphere Reserves in 94 countries, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves is a unique tool for international co-operation aiming at tracking the path of sustainable tourism through sharing of knowledge, best practices and experiences for designing and managing ecotourism.

Examples of ongoing MAB activities in biosphere reserves at the national, regional and international levels include projects to test the draft UNEP/CBD International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism, capacity building and training programmes, research and case studies on ecotourism. MAB is also an active partner in the Tour Operators Initiative (TOI) and collaborates with several other UNESCO initiatives in the area of sustainable tourism ranging from the promotion of strategies for sustainable tourism development for poverty reduction in the Sahara to the development of cultural tourism in the mountainous regions of Central Asia and the Himalayas.



Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Biosphere reserves are set-up by communities and countries and managed in order to fulfil three basic functions, which are complementary and mutually reinforcing:

- ▶ **a conservation function** – to contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
- ▶ **a development function** – to foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable;
- ▶ **a logistic function** – to provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation and development.

The added value of biosphere reserve designation lies essentially in the official recognition by a UN agency, linking with countries' own efforts to meet their obligations under international conventions such as that on biodiversity. In particular, biosphere reserves can be considered as reflecting the "ecosystem approach" adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In addition, the formal existence of the World Network, constituted by active regional sub-networks and national networks, helps countries to share information and experience within a neutral, culturally adapted setting.

Tourism related activities in selected biosphere reserves:

- ▶ MAB Young Scientists Award Research related to tourism in biosphere reserves;
- ▶ "Green label" scheme for environment-friendly products, in co-operation with tourism companies and associations. West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve (Estonia);
- ▶ Assessment of conflicting demands for water by tourism installations and other users. Amboseli Biosphere Reserve (Kenya);
- ▶ Nature-based tourism programmes tailored for such interests as bird watching, canoeing and large wild-life (wolf, elk, wild boar). Berezinskiy Biosphere Reserve (Belarus), in co-operation with Vosges du Nord Biosphere Reserve (France);
- ▶ Indicators of trail resource condition. Southern Appalachian Biosphere Reserve (United States);
- ▶ Promoting Canadian biosphere reserves as world-class ecotourism and/or adventure travel destinations. All-country project of the Canadian Biosphere Reserve Association (CBRA);
- ▶ Ecotourism guidelines for biosphere reserves in East Asia. Developed by the East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (EABRN);
- ▶ Income-generation (e.g. jewellery based on local renewable resources) as part of nature-based tourism in the Dana Biosphere Reserve (Jordan);
- ▶ *Guía Ecoturística* describing eight different tourist circuits at Bañados del Este (Uruguay).
- ▶ Ecotourism guide training for young people, São Paulo City Green Belt/Mata Atlântica Biosphere Reserve (Brasil).

The UNEP/CBD 'International Guidelines for activities

related to sustainable tourism development in vulnerable terrestrial, marine and coastal and mountain ecosystems', has been drafted in the framework of the international work programme on sustainable tourism development under the Commission on Sustainable Development. Elaborated in 2001 under the co-ordination of the CBD Secretariat, the objective of the guidelines is to assist policy and decision makers and managers responsible for tourism and biodiversity issues. The guidelines, which cover not only ecotourism, but all forms and activities of tourism, such as conventional mass tourism, culture-based tourism, cruise tourism, leisure and sports tourism, make explicit references to the biosphere reserve concept and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

UNESCO-MAB has also been called

upon to test and demonstrate the guidelines, which is an evolving instrument, through the implementation of pilot projects in biosphere reserves. This is presently being done in a number of biosphere reserves around the world in close partnerships with MAB National Committees, biosphere reserve managers, NGOs, tour operators and local community groups.

Using the draft UNEP/CBD International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism in selected biosphere reserves in Central and Eastern Europe

With the support of the MAB Secretariat, Ecological Tourism in Europe (ETE) is co-ordinating a project to promote sustainable ecotourism development based on the draft UNEP/CBD Guidelines. It involves six biosphere reserves in Eastern and Central Europe: Sumava (**Czech Republic**); Aggtelek (**Hungary**); Babia Gora (**Poland**); Polana and Slovensky Kras (**Slovakia**); Golija Studenica (**Yugoslavia**).

This project will also benefit from collaboration with the Bayerischer Wald Biosphere Reserve (**Germany**). A large number of additional biosphere reserves around the world are also considering implementing the Guidelines.

UNESCO-MAB and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves in the draft UNEP/CBD International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism



"The baseline information gathering and review process should make full use of the clearing-house mechanism under the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as of relevant networks such as the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage sites and Ramsar sites." (§21 under Baseline information and review).

"Governments may also wish to consider:

- (a) *Measures to ensure that sites designated at international level, such as Ramsar or World Heritage Sites or Biosphere Reserves, are accorded appropriate legal recognition at national level;*
- (b) *Establishing reserves based on the biosphere reserve concept and incorporating sustainable development objectives, generating income and employment opportunities for local communities, and promoting appropriate product development."* (§32 under Objectives)

From the draft UNEP/CBD International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism.

The Tour Operators Initiative (TOI).

Tour operators around the world are increasingly concerned about the need for sustainable tourism practices. Several companies have therefore joined forces under the *Tour Operators' Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development* (TOI), whereby they commit themselves to the concept of sustainable development as the core of their business activity and work together through common activities to promote and disseminate methods and practices compatible with sustainable development. TOI is supported by UNEP, UNESCO and the World Tourism Organization-WTO (who are also full TOI members) and has its secretariat at the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics in Paris.

Many TOI members are well aware of the biosphere reserve concept and some even feature biosphere reserves in their catalogues. The MAB Secretariat is actively pursuing partnerships with interested tour operators in order to promote the development of best tourism practices in biosphere reserves, in line with the MAB objective of promoting the development of quality economies in biosphere reserves. The MAB Secretariat is also committed to making TOI better known and to encourage additional companies and organizations to join the Initiative as members.

For information on ecotourism, and other tourism opportunities and experiences in biosphere reserves, please contact the biosphere reserves, or tour operators, including those linked to the Tour Operator's Initiative (TOI).

Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meetings/wstour-01/official/wstour-01-04-en.pdf

What is an estuary?

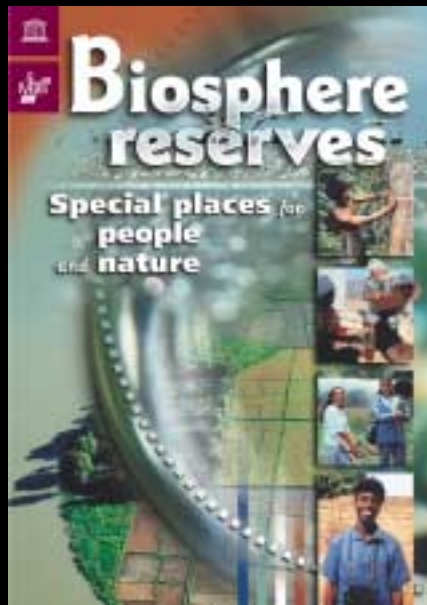
It's a zone in the coast, in "v" form, where the river joins the sea. And, in addition, it's a wonderful restaurant for birds.

Cartoon miniguide to the plants and animals, landscapes and waterscapes, of Urdaibai (Spain), through the eyes of a young explorer.



www.toinitiative.org/

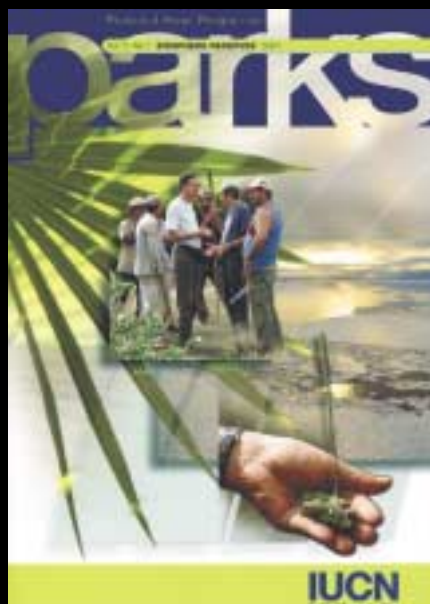
Suggested further reading



*Biosphere reserves:
Special places for people and nature.*
Published in 2002
by UNESCO Publishing.
ISBN 92-3-103813-3



*Tourism, Biodiversity
and Information,*
Edited by F. di Castri
and V. Balaji.
Published in 2002 by Backhuys Publishers. ISBN 90-5782-107-99



Issue on
Biosphere Reserves.
Parks. The international
journal for protected area
managers.
IUCN.
Vol. II. No. 1. 2001.



*People
living in
and caring
for
the biosphere*

MAB is an inter-governmental programme established by UNESCO in 1971 and implemented through more than 140 MAB National Committees around the world. The MAB Secretariat is based at UNESCO's Division of Ecological Sciences.

In the area of sustainable tourism, MAB collaborates with a number of organizations and partners, such as UNEP, GEF, WTO, WTTC, WHC, ICSU-SCOPE, CI, Ramsar Bureau, ETE and Insula.

You can contact directly the MAB National Committee or the Co-ordinator/ Focal Point for the biosphere reserves in which you are interested. Contact information is available on our web site.

For additional information on MAB and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, please contact:

MAB Secretariat

Division of Ecological
Sciences
UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
75732 Paris cedex 15
France.
E-mail : mab@unesco.org
Fax: (33) (1) 45685804

www.unesco.org/mab

© UNESCO April 2002
Printed by UNESCO
Printed in France

