



**inspire a positive future
by connecting people
and nature today**

UNESCO MAB - Reigniting Responsible Tourism

A Guide for Our World Network - 2020

A New Narrative for Responsible Tourism

A Guide for the UNESCO World Network

This guide has been created by the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves to help tell a new story that responds to the current context we are all living in.

We are in a time of transformation, which brings with it both challenge and opportunity. The tourism sector is experiencing challenge more than most, but even in the midst of significant crisis for this industry, opportunity exists.

That opportunity brings together economy, environment and society. During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, responsible tourism will represent a pathway for rehabilitation, both for the sector and for the communities they operate in.

People are more ready than ever to reimagining the way they travel and contributing to the restoration and conservation the ecosystems and cultures they visit. And the MAB network of biosphere reserves provides the ideal places to make that happen.

Meriem Bouamrane
UNESCO MAB Secretariat

Using this Guide

This resource outlines an approach for the UNESCO MAB Network to engage and inspire responsible tourism operators.

The approach is designed to help responsible tourism operators to use the unique qualities of biosphere reserves as inspiration to attract visitors to responsible tourism at an extremely challenging time for the sector, and in doing so support the MAB Network to realize its priorities.

- Read through the trends and examples
- Consider how these can form the foundation for how you communicate to tourism operators in your network
- Tailor your own messages based on what your own biosphere reserve has to offer
- Refer to the UNESCO MAB Global Communication Strategy to consider how you can reach your audiences in a more powerful way

UNESCO MAB Global Communication Strategy

“Modern, open & transparent communication”

The way UNESCO MAB communicates is changing to more effectively engage people on what a biosphere reserve is, how the network works, why it is important to others and how people can get involved.

This “big shift” was outlined in the MAB Brand & Story Toolkit and has become the inspiration for creating more dynamic and effective communication plans.

The UNESCO MAB Global Communication Strategy was created to address each of the shifts.

Our new narrative reinforces our role to inspire people with the opportunity to change through stories of change in action.

This guide invites you to bring this approach into how you seek to engage local responsible tourism operators.

Changing how we engage:

Broadcast



Conversation

Less talking to, more talking with

Explain



Inspire

Less words and justification, more inspiration and images

Place



People

Less geography, more human

Facts



Stories

Less data sharing, more storytelling

Regulation



Opportunity

Less about things people can't do, more about what they can

Sustainability must no longer be a niche part of tourism but must be the new norm for every part of our sector.

UNWTO

One Planet Vision for the Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector

The Change

Reigniting responsible tourism

The COVID-19 crisis has touched the whole world - bringing with it significant challenge to people and industries globally. Few more so than the tourism and hospitality sector, where lockdowns and travel bans have had a devastating impact on many operators and providers.

With 1 in 10 people globally employed in tourism, the effect on local economies is significant. And when practiced responsibly, we know that tourism can play an important role in connecting people with nature, and experiencing other cultures. It has the potential to support the conservation and restoration of both ecosystems and local and indigenous knowledge.

As with all significant transformations, there is always opportunity. In this case, we see the opportunity for the MAB network of biosphere reserves to play a role in reigniting responsible tourism in the wake of the global pandemic. We are positioned to support operators to practice more responsible business, and to use the amazing natural and cultural experiences that exist in biosphere reserves across the world to cater to the growing demand for more local, meaningful and even virtual travel experiences.

1 in 10 jobs worldwide are in tourism - UNWTO

By helping to reignite responsible tourism across our network, we have the opportunity to make a significant positive economic impact as we seek to conserve and restore ecosystems and local & indigenous knowledge.

Our New Narrative

Our approach to engaging responsible tourism providers is rooted in the UNESCO MAB network's new narrative - our way of understanding the role we play in this time of transformation.

This is a time of transformation, which brings both challenge and opportunity

In terms of responsible tourism, the challenge is obvious: Travel is predicted to fall globally by 80% for 2020. This will have a catastrophic effect on many people working in this sector.

But for those able to survive, moving forward in a more responsible direction will provide a great advantage for them.

Biosphere reserves represent a beacon for sustainable development globally and locally

Before the Pandemic the travel and hospitality sector was already predicting rapid growth in more responsible tourism. The desire to enjoy more local and meaningful travel is expected to rise during and after this crisis.

If biosphere reserves are to represent a beacon for sustainable development globally and locally - we must influence and support responsible tour operators to embrace this opportunity.

We inspire change with real stories of practical transformative action

When surveyed, respondents agree that our biggest challenge in engaging tourism providers is to help them use the biosphere reserve story to help tourism providers attract and engage their visitors.

We have real stories of practical transformation that can support responsible tour operators in the most impactful way.

3 trends in tourism

In the aftermath of the global pandemic, and the climate protests led by Greta Thurberg that preceded it, we are seeing three important trends that the MAB network can support to help reignite responsible tourism.



Local

With people being unable to travel internationally and over long distances, tourism providers and operators are focusing on local markets as they re-open, seeking to attract visitors from local communities.

This works well in some parts of the world, but can be more challenging for other parts who rely more heavily on an international tourist market.



Meaningful

There's a shift towards meaningful travel where tourists are looking for an elevated travel experience that brings richness to their life, above and beyond just relaxing on a beach.

These tourists want to *involve* themselves in local nature and culture. They represent a generation of more conscious travellers who understand and want to manage the impact their trip has on the area they visit.



Virtual

In the absence of being able to physically visit places of interest and beauty, we are seeing a shift towards taking that experience to people's homes instead, using technology.

As well as being ways to stimulate tourism in general, each of these transformations also have the potential to make a more positive impact from a sustainability perspective.

Local

What is this trend about?

Local vacations are rising in popularity, particularly under current pandemic circumstances. 2020 has been dubbed the year of the “staycation” where tourists opt for local experiences, rather than travelling further afield.


Why the MAB network is well positioned to help

Our global communication strategy focuses on local communities as one of our key target audiences. This group can raise awareness and create action through experiencing the richness of their local area. Raising local awareness of the existence of biosphere reserves, their roles, and the richness of nature and culture they offer is a win-win for the MAB network and local tourism operators.

Top tips for engaging on this trend

1. Make it easier for local tourism operators to understand what attractions and experiences the biosphere reserve has to offer local communities.
2. Helping operators create a celebration of what’s right in their backyard to enjoy - alongside clear ways for it to be enjoyed safely.
3. Use communication that is geared towards residents by using local language and references.
4. Partner with local providers to encourage local “staycation” deals for communities and residents.





This is Our #VancouverComeBack

As we reopen our city to locals and visitors, we know we must act cautiously and responsibly to not undo the great work that all British Columbians have done so far. That is why we, along with our industry partners, are listening carefully to the Ministry of Health and WorksafeBC to ensure every possible safety protocol is in place. We will continue to monitor our progress closely and adapt as the situation evolves.

More [COVID-19 Update & Information](#)

Image: tourismvancouver.com/comeback/

Tourism Vancouver launched a campaign to bring residents back to the community in a safe way with a focus on local restaurants, hotels, attractions and businesses.




1. Point Grondine Park
Learn about Anishinaabek culture as you canoe, camp & hike in this large natural park.
visitamazingplaces.ca/pgg
Highway 637, Killarney

2. Five Finger Rapids
At the headwaters of the French River in Dokis First Nation, wilderness camping awaits.
visitamazingplaces.ca/ffr
Dokis Reserve Rd, West Nipissing

3. French River Gorge
Enjoy a spectacular view of the river and learn about Indigenous cultures at the Visitor Centre.
visitamazingplaces.ca/frg
20526 Highway 69

Image: visitamazingplaces.ca

The Amazing Places mapping project - initiated by Fundy Biosphere reserve in Canada - maps amazing places to visit, which is targeted at visitors but also local residents of Canadian Biosphere reserves like Georgian Bay, Frontenac Arch. This local initiative raises awareness of amazing local sights and experiences.

Meaningful

What is this trend about?

The pandemic and preceding climate protests have created a growing consciousness and desire (especially among younger demographics) to travel in more ethical, responsible and sustainable ways. These visitors want to travel, eat and stay in more sustainable ways, as well as play a more active role in engaging with the nature and cultures they visit.

Why the MAB network is well positioned to help
Biosphere reserves are places where sustainable development is happening - whether through conservation of biodiversity, restoration of ecosystems or respecting and sharing local and indigenous knowledge. Across our network we have a huge number of attractions, activities and experiences that lend themselves to more responsible and meaningful tourism.

Top tips for engaging on this trend

1. Communicate to tour operators the opportunities for visitors to play a more active role in nature conservation, engaging with local communities or experiencing local customs
2. Remember that the prime audience for this work is younger generations, so tailor your language and communication channels to suit younger people
3. Remember to sell the positive impact tourists can have, and how, as much as the experience of visiting the place.



‘Transformational travel’ is intentionally travelling to stretch, learn and grow into new ways of being and engaging with the world.

Kristie Goshaw, CMO, Preferred Hotels & Resorts



Image: Empowerment Tourism www.empowermenttourism.com/

Empowerment Tourism is a tour operator specialising in social impact and cultural immersion tours. Travellers see the country's famous sights and know first hand that their funds and time have created new jobs and left someone inspired on a new business venture.



Image: ecoturismo.lanzarotebiosfera.org

Revivir Lanzarote is a sustainable tourism campaign promoting the Lanzarote Biosphere Reserve's unique landscape and culture, and the hand-on ways tourists can involve themselves in the place.

Virtual

What this trend is about

Virtual tourism is all about how we use the power of technology to connect people around the world remotely with our nature, culture and local and indigenous knowledge. Through virtual tourism, we can access a global audience and take the experience to people no matter where they are in the world.

Why the MAB network is well positioned to help

Currently, there's a huge appetite for people to experience cultural and natural activities while in lockdown. Each reserve has unique aspects that are worth communicating and sharing, so shifting focus to how we are equipping tourism operators with this kind of content will enable them to step in and embrace the stories we have to offer at a time when they are looking for unique content that stimulate their business.

Top tips for engaging on this trend

1. Help local tour operators connect to experiences in your biosphere reserve that could translate to virtual content
2. Help residents of the biosphere reserve - from artists, to chefs, to farmers - connect the experience they have to offer with local tourism operators.
3. Remember that short, simple and memorable experiences translate best into virtual content.



Image: <https://www.virtualyosemite.org/>

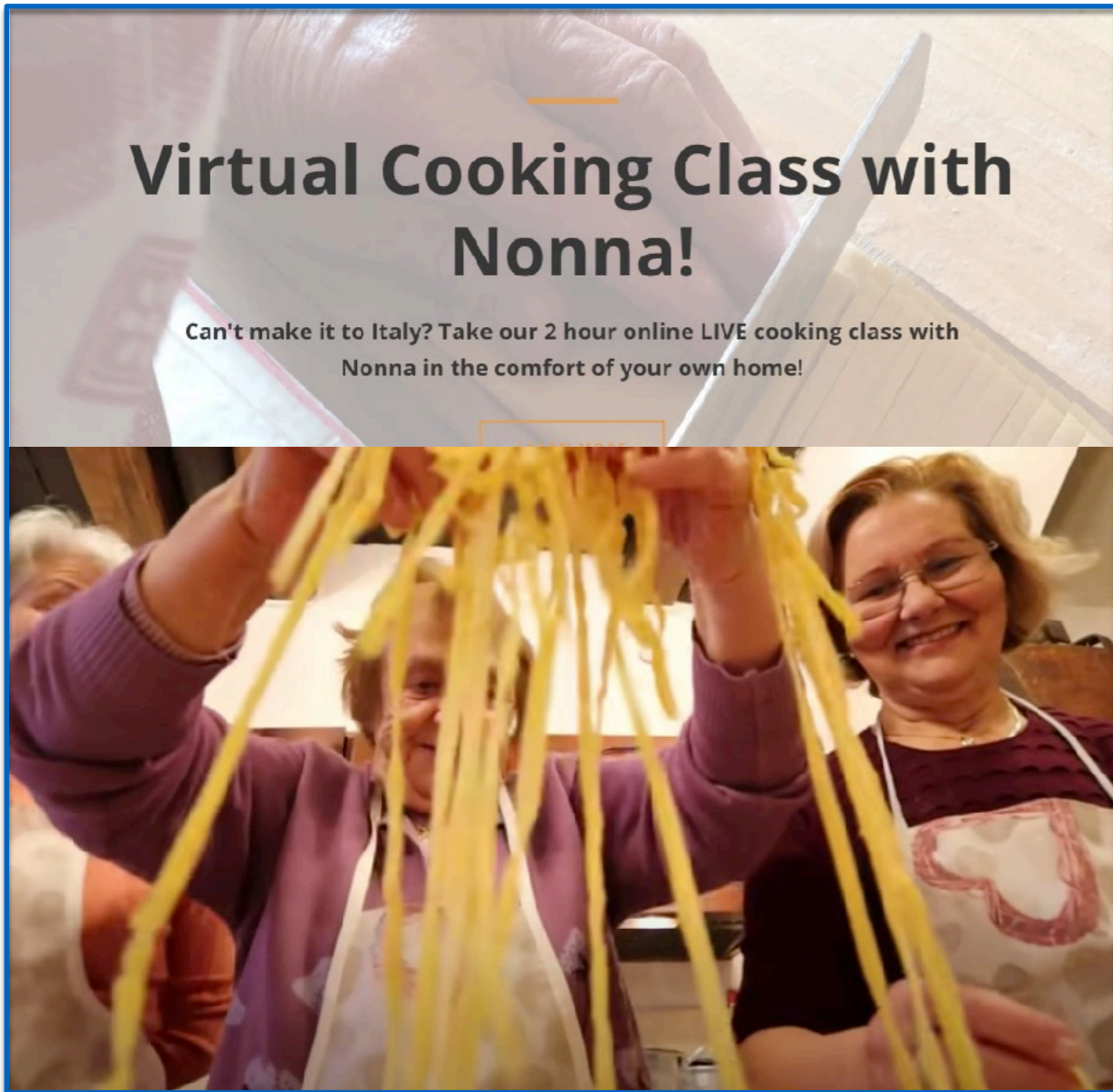


Image: nonnalive.com

As tourism came to a standstill in Nonna's Italian village, she opted to take her experience online, sharing her cooking classes with a global audience. Now, this virtual experience is top rated on Airbnb.

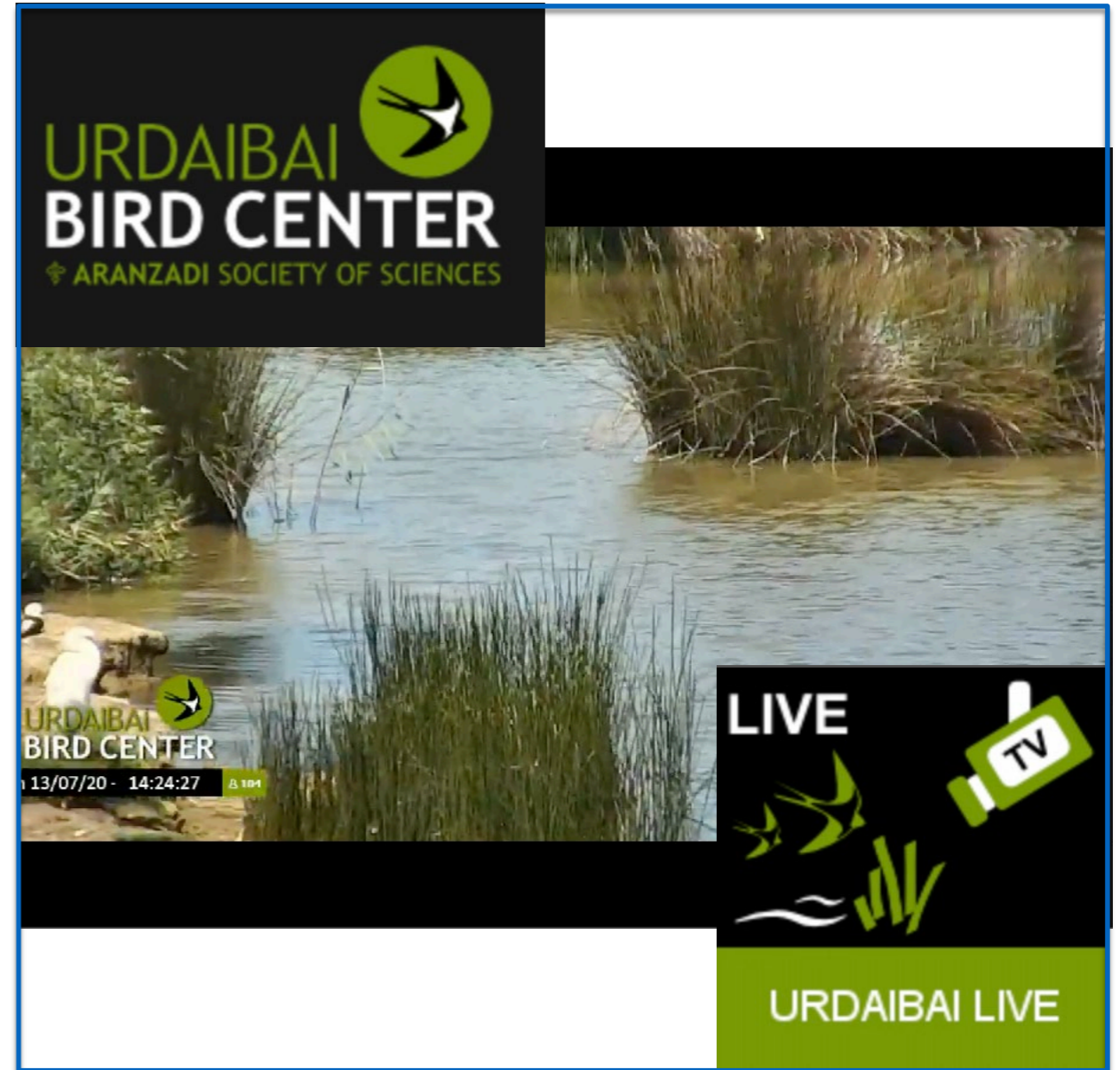


Image: birdcenter.org

Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve's Bird Centre has live cam footage of the wetlands and birdlife. Many biosphere reserves have created amazing virtual 360 exploratory tours of their places.

Reigniting responsible tourism

FAQs

What makes the biosphere reserve message to responsible tourism operators different to other UNESCO and UN agencies?

UNESCO biosphere reserves are examples of where sustainable living is making a difference and where a positive transformation is already happening. We are already living proof of sustainable development in action - our narrative and the focal areas of Restore, Conserve and Amplify reinforce that. We differentiate our role by demonstrating that it is already possible to live in harmony with nature.

How do we reignite responsible tourism, as opposed to tourism that is unsustainable?

This guide focusses primarily on ways of engaging responsible tourism operators around the opportunity that exists in biosphere reserves for them to attract visitors to sustain their businesses. The trends of more local, meaningful and virtual tourism offer real potential for a more responsible approach to travel. However, if you are looking for more practical guidance, or more education, around what makes tourism responsible - we would direct you to policies and practices that your regional MAB network may have created.

Where can we find more information about how to engage and inspire people with the Biosphere Reserve message?

We strongly recommend you use this guide alongside the UNESCO MAB Global Communications Strategy, which provides a great deal more guidance around how to communicate the biosphere reserve story to the audiences we need to impact most. The strategy provides practical tips for effective communication and examples of best practice from around the global network.

Won't communicating a positive message about reigniting an industry at a time when it is in crisis feel insensitive?

It is important to acknowledge that many operators in the global tourism industry are seeing a threat to the existence of their businesses. That includes responsible tourism operators too. It's also important to recognize that the situation in different parts of the industry, and in different parts of the world may be very different. However, the MAB values encourage us to 'model solutions' as a way of inspiring people toward a positive future. Our role here is to acknowledge the challenge, and offer what we see as potential solutions that have the potential to address economic challenge at the same time as making a positive impact on ecosystems, biodiversity and local and indigenous knowledge.

UNESCO MAB - Communicating the Biosphere Reserve
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