Sustainable Tourism and Protected and Conserved Areas: COVID-19 Impacts and Recovery

White paper, December 2022
Acknowledgements

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1. INTRODUCTION: TOURISM, COVID-19 AND PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS

Protected and conserved areas and tourism

Tourism in protected and conserved areas (PCA) is a major part of the global tourism industry. The effective planning and management of tourism in and around PCAs is central to ensuring best practice governance, management and conservation outcomes for the natural world (Spenceley et al., 2015; Leung et al., 2018). Sustainable and well-managed nature-based tourism can provide important conservation benefits such as fostering a connection between visitors and PCA values, or the economic benefits of revenue generation through entry fees and creating employment opportunities that involve and benefit local communities. However, inappropriate and poorly managed tourism, such as mass tourism, inappropriate infrastructure development, or over-tourism, can lead to various negative impacts on natural values such as biodiversity, landscapes, and the resource base of PCAs (Leung et al., 2018).

International instruments and agreements can play an important role in tourism and conservation management through fostering collaboration at the global, regional and national levels. World Heritage sites represent some of the world’s most unique and precious protected areas that are considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. Embodied in an international treaty, conserving World Heritage sites can be considered a litmus test for the broader success of conservation worldwide, thus represents a clear opportunity to take a leadership in conservation practice. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention is also a globally recognized brand, which when combined with the scale noted above, can mobilize significant tourism related business and benefits if carefully managed.

The IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas (Green List) provides a global benchmark for PCAs to assess whether they are achieving successful conservation outcomes through effective and equitable governance and management. The global Green List Standard also aims to ensure that tourism and visitor management are compatible with and support the achievement of the area’s conservation goals and objectives (IUCN Green List, 2022).

“At this critical time, we assert that effectively and equitably managed networks of well-connected protected and conserved areas, by maintaining the ecological integrity of natural ecosystems, provide one of the most important ways in which to strengthen and repair the relationship between people and the natural systems on which they depend. Of course, protected and conserved areas cannot address all the issues around COVID-19 and the natural world. However, they are both highly impacted and do offer important solutions.”

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, 2020
COVID-19 impacts on tourism and protected and conserved areas

The global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism and PCAs have been widely documented and discussed by expert bodies, with specialist task forces being established such as the IUCN World Commission on Protected areas (WCPA) COVID-19 Protected Areas Task Force (IUCN, 2020), and the UNESCO Task Force on Culture, Tourism and COVID-19 in relation to World Heritage sites.

In May 2020, the International Journal of Protected Areas and Conservation (PARKS) published a special editorial on Conserving Nature in a time of crisis: Protected Areas and COVID-19, providing an early snapshot of COVID-19 impacts on PCAs around the world. It highlighted significant negative impacts on management capacity, budgets and effectiveness, as well as on the livelihoods of communities living in and around these areas. It outlined the importance of how effectively and equitably managed systems of PCAs “can be part of a response to the pandemic that both lessens the chance of a recurrence of similar events and builds a more sustainable future for people and nature” (Hockings et al, 2020).

The subsequent 2021 PARKS Special Issue on COVID-19 presented expert insights into the impact and implications of COVID-19 on the world’s PCAs, ranging from drivers of zoonotic diseases and lessons learnt from previous pandemics; global and regional perspectives on impacts of COVID-19 on PCAs; Indigenous peoples and local communities; urban parks and protected areas; marine protected areas; tourism; rangers; to policies and economic recovery plans. Specific to tourism, it highlights the significant impacts on protected area tourism economies, especially in developing countries where international tourism revenue had previously supported many jobs and conservation operations in remote places of natural significance, with local people living in and around PCAs being worst affected (IUCN WCPA, 2021). These are just some of the many publications that have been produced since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Around the world, major organisations have responded by assessing the impacts of COVID-19 and addressing the recovery steps and principles required to ‘build back better’. For example, the WCPA COVID-19 Protected Areas Task Force addressed protected area impacts and recovery; UNESCO tracked impacts on World Heritage sites and surveyed site managers (UNESCO 2021, 2022a); the European Commission developed guidance for protected area authorities and managers on tourism and visitation to protected areas amid COVID-19 (European Commission, 2021); wildlife experts such as the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Wildlife Health Specialist Group and the Primate Specialist Group developed species-focused guidance (IUCN SSC, 2021); and organisations such as EcoHealth Alliance emphasised the importance of a holistic One Health approach to recovery in an interconnected world (IUCN and EcoHealth Alliance, 2022; 2022a).

The importance of strengthening the role of sustainable tourism in biodiversity conservation and community resilience was emphasised at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2021, including through the adoption of Resolution 130 which recognises that “more effective implementation of sustainable nature-based tourism strategies and benefit-sharing programmes is an integral part of community recovery to strengthen resilience during future adverse events and to build a more sustainable future for people and wildlife” (IUCN, 2021).

This white paper provides a brief synthesis of various components of the Sustainable Tourism and Protected Areas in a Post-COVID World project focused on sustainable tourism in PCAs including community benefits, tourism management, and post-COVID-19 recovery. It includes global findings; local case studies including PANORAMA Solutions from PCAs around the world; community experiences from PCAs in Peru and Viet Nam; and new best practice guidelines such as a One Health approach to tourism in PCAs. It provides high-level practical recommendations towards achieving a sustainable nature-based tourism recovery process into the future.
2. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREA RESPONSE MEASURES TO COVID-19

2.1 PROMOTING COMMUNITY BENEFITS FROM TOURISM

To support the COVID-19 response to impacts on local benefits from tourism, and increase future benefits from tourism, the project brought together local communities with managers of the protected areas in Peru and Viet Nam. By working together through participatory engagement and action planning in Peru, and through community engagement in sustainable tourism response measures in Viet Nam, along with a dedicated ‘Cash-for-Work’ scheme and a series of training workshops in both countries, community benefits from tourism were promoted as a way to recover from the pandemic whilst conserving nature.

Supporting resilience and growth of community-led ecotourism in Amarakaeri Communal Reserve, Peru

The Amarakaeri Communal Reserve (ACR) is located in the province of Manú in southeast Peru. As one of the first indigenous co-managed IUCN Green List sites in the world, the ACR was established to contribute to the protection of the Madre de Dios and Colorado river basins, forests, and soil stability to maintain the quality and quantity of water, the ecological balance and an adequate environment for indigenous peoples and local communities (IUCN Green List, 2022a).

Tourism in the communities of the ACR has been developing for around twenty years, and although the local industry remains relatively low scale, visitor numbers had seen steady increases in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic accompanied by corresponding benefits to local livelihoods. However, in March 2020, the Amarakaeri closed their community and entered into voluntary isolation to avoid the spread of COVID-19 into the community. This led to economic losses, with communities relying more on traditional livelihood activities including fruit gathering, traditional fishing and hunting, and agriculture.
Community action plans for tourism development were developed through a participatory planning process, led by the Queros, Shintuya, Puerto Azul Mberowe, Boca Ishiriwe and Barranco Chico communities, with the support of the project’s technical team. The plans identify objectives, goals, activities and performance indicators based on achieving a ‘Collective Dream’ that:

‘the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve is a tourist destination that works with communities that are responsible with the environment and the local ancestral culture, and that promote continuous improvement projects.’

The community action plans are therefore part of each community's vision of sustainable tourism and the measures they identify to achieve it, and based on the need of the community and the opportunities presented by tourism to create a positive impact on households affected by COVID-19.
Improving tourism facilities through Cash-for-Work in local communities

The concept of ‘Cash-for-Work’ programming is a relatively new yet increasingly common form of short-term intervention used globally to provide temporary employment following a disaster or a crisis. As part of the project, a ‘Cash for-Work’ approach was adopted to enable local community families to benefit from income and employment on community works in support of maintaining tourism infrastructure, values and protected area operations, with the overall aim of reducing the impact of COVID-19 on local livelihoods through tourism. Cash-for-Work programmes were carried out with communities in the vicinity of the four target PCAs in Peru and Viet Nam. Highlighted below are two examples from Viet Nam, where investment in local communities to improve tourism infrastructure and natural spaces through the project aims to boost local economies through sustainable tourism practices. See PANORAMA Solutions for details of the projects supported in the Peruvian sites.

Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve, Viet Nam

Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve is one of the largest wetland nature reserves in the Vietnamese Northern Delta. Covering more than 3,500 hectares, the Reserve consists of varied limestone forest and wetland ecosystems that are home to abundant flora and fauna.

Due to the lack of use of tourist waterways in Van Long during the pandemic, the routes used by tour operators had become blocked by invasive water hyacinth. Using funds from the project, a hundred local people were hired to clear these waterways to facilitate the recovery of the tour routes, including the new itinerary developed with Planeterra also through this project.

Cuc Phuong National Park, Viet Nam

Established in 1962, Cuc Phuong is the first National Park in Viet Nam. Covering more than 22,000 hectares of the foothills of the northern Annamite Range in Ninh Binh, Hoa Binh and Thanh Hoa provinces, the National Park is home to rich biodiversity, including critically endangered species such as Delacour’s langur.

Tourism in Khanh village, on the outskirts of the National Park, centres around the rich culture of Muong ethnic people, one of Viet Nam’s 54 ethnic groups. The project outlined financial support for renovation of forest trails to be used for tours, as well as to recover and restore a handloom and materials for weaving used in tourism activities.
Training to enhance community knowledge and skills for tourism

In addition to the 'Cash-for-Work' activities, training was provided to local communities to take advantage of tourism in enhancing their livelihoods. With the aim of equipping local communities with the knowledge to develop ecotourism experiences, based on potential tourism assets of their communities, with the involvement of the right stakeholders and in line with best practice principles in health and safety, training workshops were carried out amongst the communities surrounding the target protected areas in Peru and Viet Nam.

After these training experiences, communities applied their new knowledge, whilst taking advantage of the new infrastructure and facilities built through the 'Cash-for-Work' scheme by welcoming pilot tours to their communities. Hosting these pilot excursions, which were designed in partnership between the communities, Planeterra and IUCN, allowed local people to benefit financially as well as gain feedback from guests to improve the activities for future tours.
2.2 ENHANCING TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS

A focus of the project included providing operational support to protected area managers and community representatives around capacity and resourcing needs in the PCAs in Peru and Viet Nam. The following examples outline tourism management planning in the Río Abiseo National Park World Heritage site in Peru and participatory 3D mapping in Cuc Phuong National Park in Viet Nam.

Management planning for tourism in Río Abiseo National Park World Heritage site, Peru

Río Abiseo National Park (RANP) is a UNESCO World Heritage site inscribed for both its natural and cultural values, covering 274,520 hectares of the Eastern Cordillera – a vital part of the Amazon watershed. The area protects several forest types and high Andean ‘Paramo’ grasslands, and is home to extraordinary archaeological sites showing evidence of at least eight millennia of human history (SOUV, 2022).

Whilst the main income generating activity of communities living in the vicinity of RANP is agriculture, tourism linked to the National Park holds significant potential to contribute to the local economy. The pandemic saw the number of tourists visiting the National Park decline significantly. This has had a dramatic impact on the local economy for 10 communities in the immediate vicinity, affecting more than 1,800 people. At the time of World Heritage inscription in 1990, support for tourism was provided as a potential livelihood alternative to other practices such as mining and exploitation of forest resources. The fall in visitation therefore prompted concerns over the revival of such unsustainable livelihood practices. As such, it is essential that communities are supported to help relieve the economic impact of the pandemic through the effective promotion and management of sustainable tourism as part of a nature-based economy through the RANP.

Surveys with local communities in the vicinity of RANP, undertaken by Planeterra, found that whilst the main income generating activity of communities living in the vicinity of RANP is agriculture, tourism linked to the National Park holds significant potential to contribute to the local economy. The surveys found a need for improved access to support tools, greater capacity and the participation of local authorities and the private sector in improving the tourist destination (Planeterra Baseline Survey, 2022).

The RANP carries significant tourism potential as the anchor of the Abiseo destination with a wide variety to offer tourists in terms of nature and agritourism activities. As such, there is an opportunity for RANP managers to use tourism as a tool to enhance the conservation of the protected area (IUCN SUR Baseline Survey, 2022). Working with authorities and site managers in Peru, IUCN SUR compiled a series of lessons learned, and developed strategies and recommendations focussed on effective management, strategic partnerships (including with the private sector), marketing and sustainability to promote tourism in the National Park as a viable solution for the recovery of the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, whilst conserving the natural and cultural values of the Park.

Building on these recommendations as well as community-led Action Plans developed through the project, training was provided to local communities in tourism product and itinerary development, marketing and health and safety practices, alongside a ‘Cash-for-Work’ programme to increase the infrastructure and capacity to accommodate tourists amongst the communities (Orellana, 2022). The success of these activities is also based on collaboration with National Park managers and staff. To ensure that the outcomes were understood and can be integrated into management and planning for tourism in the National Park in future, the local Río Abiseo offices of SERNANP, the Peruvian authority for protected areas, joined the development workshops and socialization process.
Participatory 3D mapping in Cuc Phuong National Park: a novel approach for inclusive planning of tourism in a protected area

Participatory mapping can be a powerful tool that allows communities to bring their local knowledge and perspectives to inform strategies for management (Rambaldi, in progress). It can also help reclaim lost memories about the traditional ways of living, foster intergenerational knowledge exchange and raise awareness across generations about the status of the environment, access to and use of local natural resources, and the impacts of COVID-19 on these.

Bringing together local residents from 18 villages located in Cuc Phuong National Park’s core and buffer zones, with the National Park authorities, IUCN facilitated a series of participatory mapping exercises to share and improve knowledge between local communities, decision-makers and protected area managers, and to design strategies for management of tourism in the protected area.

Using a 3D model of the National Park to identify land use, vegetation cover, species information, sacred places and other natural, cultural, spiritual and social features, knowledge holders in the communities documented the relationships between natural and cultural values of the landscape by locating their tangible and intangible heritage, as well as the potential for community-based tourism activities.

By sharing the model, developed by the community with the Cuc Phuong National Park Management Board, the exercise represented an inclusive approach to develop equitable and sustainable community-based tourism products (IUCN, 2022).
2.3 SHARING SOLUTIONS FOR TOURISM IN PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS

This section presents solutions and approaches from various components of the Sustainable Tourism and Protected Areas in a Post-COVID World project and provides practical high-level recommendations towards achieving a sustainable nature-based tourism recovery process going forward.

PANORAMA – Solutions for a Healthy Planet

PANORAMA – Solutions for a Healthy Planet is a partnership initiative to document and promote examples of inspiring, replicable solutions across a range of conservation and sustainable development topics, enabling cross-sectoral learning and upscaling of successes. It allows practitioners to share and reflect on their experiences, increase recognition for successful work, and to learn with their peers how similar challenges have been addressed around the globe (PANORAMA, 2018).

The online PANORAMA platform provides PCA practitioners with access to resources including Solutions in Focus publications, as well as individual solution case studies, available by region, ecosystem, thematic communities (e.g. One Health, World Heritage, Nature Culture, management planning), and challenges.

The PANORAMA Solutions in focus series of compilations assemble PANORAMA solution case studies on a defined topic. ‘Solutions in Focus’ zooms in on a topic of interest covered by PANORAMA, allowing to explore common elements and shared learnings across success stories. It is a snapshot of the PANORAMA portfolio at a given time, rather than a representative assembly of selected ‘best practices’ on the issue at hand.

Developed as part of this project, the Solutions in Focus: Sustainable Tourism in Protected and Conserved Areas report presents 22 case studies from Central and South America, Asia and Africa, summarised into three broad themes: rapid responses to the loss of tourism revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainable tourism models, and tourism as a component of a wider holistic approach (PANORAMA, 2022).

Case studies include providing rapid financial support for Community Bird Guides following COVID-19 closures in South Africa; the aforementioned ‘Cash-for-Work’ to promote community tourism and ensure direct economic income to the local population in Peru (see section on Peruvian sites); engaging communities in conservation activities such as habitat restoration to address invasive alien species in Sri Lanka and engaging unemployed naturalist guides to catalogue the biodiversity of the Galápagos Islands using DNA sequencing in Ecuador; as well as mitigating zoonotic disease transmission with a One Health approach to gorilla conservation and gorilla tourism in Uganda (see sections on One Health and the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park). Details of each case study are available through the Solutions in Focus publication and the PANORAMA Solutions platform.

A further Solutions in Focus: Wildlife Health and Zoonotic Disease Risk Reduction publication was published in late 2022 (PANORAMA, 2022a).

- PANORAMA Solutions for a Healthy Planet
- PANORAMA Solutions in Focus
  - Solutions in Focus: Sustainable Tourism in Protected and Conserved Areas
  - Solutions in Focus: Wildlife Health and Zoonotic Disease Risk Reduction
- PANORAMA Thematic Communities:
  - Nature Culture
  - One Health
The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the critical importance of the complex interconnections between the health of people, wildlife and our shared environment (Hockings et al, 2020; Ferreira et al, 2021). Investing in effectively and equitably managed PCAs is an important part of ensuring planetary health for a nature-based recovery process (Kroner, 2021), with PCAs playing a key role in safeguarding ecological integrity and minimising zoonotic disease risk (Reaser, 2021).

One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognizes that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and inter-dependent (IUCN and EcoHealth Alliance, 2022).

Recognising the important role of tourism in PCAs, a One Health approach is needed to help identify the links between human, animal and environmental health and manage potential threats or impacts related to tourism. This has led to the development of the One Health Principles for Sustainable Tourism in Protected and Conserved Areas through this project (IUCN and EcoHealth Alliance, 2022).

The six core principles provide practical strategies for tour operators and wider tourism industry stakeholders in PCAs, looking at tourism in PCAs and taking stock of lessons learned from PCAs and the tourism sector from recent disease events:

1. Promote and protect the health of humans and other species
2. Proactively manage health threats in ways that minimize degradation of ecosystems or produce co-benefits for nature
3. Take into account context when designing or adapting disease risk reduction and resilience approaches
4. Empower visitors and tour operators to be good stewards of their health and the health of the local communities and ecosystems they visit
5. Ensure the equitable sharing of knowledge and benefits from tourism-based research and surveillance
6. Coordinate and collaborate across sectors to support prevention, detection, response, and recovery from disease threats.

A collation of One Health related PANORAMA Solutions case studies from practitioners around the world is provided in the aforementioned Solutions in Focus publication, individual Solutions through the online platform, and the case study of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park World Heritage site in Uganda outlined in Box II.

**One Health principles for sustainable tourism in protected and conserved areas**: Accompanying principles to the guidelines for prevention, detection, response and recovery from disease risks in and around protected and conserved areas.

**Healthy people and wildlife through nature protection**: Guidelines for prevention, detection, response, and recovery from disease risks in and around protected and conserved areas

**PANORAMA One Health Thematic Community**
Virtual Tourism opportunities to connect people with nature

The majority of nature-based tourism is through physical visitation to natural sites around the world. In recent decades however, online experiences such as virtual reality (VR) or virtual tours have emerged to remotely connect people with nature. For example, the Google Arts and Culture platform provides virtual access to PCAs around the world including World Heritage sites such as Kilimanjaro National Park (United Republic of Tanzania) or Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes (Republic of Korea) through the UNESCO World Heritage Site Virtual Tours (Google Arts and Culture, 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as sites around the world were forced to close down to tourism, virtual tourism experiences have allowed people to engage with the world’s natural environments from their homes. New virtual tourism experiences emerged, such as initiatives across Africa (European Commission, 2022) and video reports provided by World Heritage site managers (UNESCO, 2021).

Rebounding from the effects of the pandemic requires innovative thought about tourism experiences, such as virtual tourism (IUCN WCPA, 2021). It can offer new opportunities for PCA practitioners and local communities to connect with audiences around the world in order to raise public awareness on the importance of the site’s conservation values, and has potential to generate new revenue streams.

There is an opportunity to strengthen investment in and support for the expansion of virtual sustainable tourism practices in PCAs going forward, including by sharing best-practice tools and experiences through local, regional and global networks.

With this in mind, a summary of best practices in virtual tourism in PCAs during the COVID-19 pandemic was developed through the project. The document offers an insight into different ways that PCA managers and tour operators faced the challenges of decreased on-site visitation to PCAs through the development of virtual solutions. This will be available in 2023.

Best practice tools for sustainable tourism in World Heritage

At the 50th anniversary celebration of the World Heritage Convention in November 2022, the need to rethink destination management to ensure a clear focus on World Heritage values was highlighted – i.e. to move away from focusing on tourist attractions and towards experiencing the uniqueness of natural and cultural World Heritage values, including to maintain social networks and encourage cultural diversity, to diversify economies and focus on quality, with the need to ensure community resilience and putting communities at the heart of tourism management (UNESCO, 2022d).

Best practice tools and guidelines for practitioners in a World Heritage context are developed by the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme (UNESCO, 2022b) and IUCN-ICCROM World Heritage Leadership Programme (IUCN-ICCROM, 2022) to build capacity of practitioners. The IUCN-ICCROM World Heritage Leadership Programme highlights the importance of building the capacity of practitioners in a way that places people at the centre and fully integrates the management of natural and cultural heritage. The continued development and implementation of best practice tools will remain key to ensuring the effective management of tourism in and around PCAs and in conserving our most outstanding natural World Heritage around the world. Whilst the following tools are not specific to only tourism and COVID-19 recovery in World Heritage, they support best practice sustainable tourism management for World Heritage, which is critical to tourism recovery processes and future tourism planning.

⇒ UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme (UNESCO, 2022b).
⇒ Enhancing our Heritage Toolkit 2.0 (EOH).
⇒ Visitors count! Guidance for protected areas on the economic analysis of visitation (Spenceley et al., 2021).

A new dedicated World Heritage Leadership Programme website will be available in early 2023 at www.managingworldheritage.org
In 2022, 257 natural and mixed UNESCO World Heritage sites are recognised for their unique Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) to humankind, encompassing some of the world’s most extraordinary biodiversity, aesthetic beauty of land and seascapes, and providing critical refuges for endangered species (UNESCO, 2022).

Sustainable and well-managed tourism practices in and around World Heritage sites provide important conservation benefits, such as raising awareness of the World Heritage values and revenue generation for management activities through tourism activities or entry fees. The first global IUCN assessment of ecosystem services and benefits of natural World Heritage highlighted the importance of tourism, with ‘recreation and tourism’ identified as a benefit in 93% of sites and representing the most commonly shared benefit across all natural and mixed World Heritage sites (Osipova et al., 2014). Examples of the many positive benefits of sustainable tourism to World Heritage are available, for example, in the 2020 IUCN World Heritage conservation outlook assessments, the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Programme, or PANORAMA Solution case studies.

However, tourism pressure can also negatively impact on World Heritage values if it is not sustainably planned and managed, leading to issues such as mass tourism, inappropriate infrastructure development or over-tourism. In 2020, the IUCN World Heritage Outlook 3, the latest global assessment of the conservation outlook for natural World Heritage, highlighted tourism as the third highest current threat to natural heritage (after climate change and invasive alien species). The overall number of sites facing tourism pressure has increased over time, with 51 sites assessed as highly threatened by direct impacts of tourism in 2020, compared to 43 in 2014 and 45 in 2017. Furthermore, tourism infrastructure and visitation are two of the top ten potential future threats. In less than half of sites, tourism management and interpretation was assessed as being ‘highly’ or ‘mostly’ effective, and sites where sustainable financing was considered to be of serious concern were more likely to experience tourism and visitation management issues.

In summary, these reports highlight important positive benefits of sustainable tourism to natural World Heritage, whilst emphasising the need to implement effective sustainable management measures that both address existing tourism pressures and ensure a proactive, equitable and sustainable management approach for any future tourism planning. This is particularly important for tourism recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as regarding future tourism development relating to World Heritage sites and other PCAs.

COVID-19, World Heritage and Tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted World Heritage sites around the world. In 2020, UNESCO in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Convention (ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN) established the UNESCO Task Force on Culture, Tourism and COVID-19, and tracked the closure of sites to tourism around the world (UNESCO, 2022a). In 2021, site managers from more than fifty World Heritage sites around the world shared their insights and experiences of the pandemic in video messages (UNESCO, 2021). A UNESCO World Heritage in the face of COVID-19 report based on surveys of site managers and national authorities, reported that at the height of the crisis 90% of countries with World Heritage sites had closed or partially closed their sites. Resulting implications for tourism and management include a drop in visitation and revenue, staff redundancies, as well as an overwhelming report of large impacts on local communities, particularly from the loss of revenue due to the reductions in visitor numbers. Some sites also reported that a decrease in monitoring and management capacity resulted in cases of negative activities such as illegal logging and mining, poaching and vandalism. A survey response noted the need for a recovery process that “includes measures to support the tourism sector and communities and to safeguard livelihoods in the transition towards more versatile and resilient World Heritage site management” (UNESCO, 2021a).

It is notable that the 2020 IUCN World Heritage Outlook 3, which was produced as COVID-19 was emerging, reported early positive impacts on World Heritage values, most notably a short-term decrease in tourism visitation which eased pressure on natural ecosystems. However, numerous negative impacts were also reported categorised broadly into three areas: disruptions in work activities, site planning and management, and law enforcement and patrolling (Osipova et al, 2020).
An interesting case study that spans the various discussion topics of this white paper is Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) in Uganda.

The site is recognised as a World Heritage site for its exceptional biodiversity and is home to around half of the world’s endangered mountain gorilla population (UNESCO 2022f, Hickey et al, 2020). The continued growth of gorilla-based tourism operations in BINP has created a strong economic incentive for enhanced protection and efforts to alleviate the poverty drivers of biodiversity loss (Osipova et al, 2020). However, with the closure of the site to tourism during COVID-19, local livelihoods dependent on tourism were impacted and illegal activities such as poaching increased. A tragic consequence was the killing of Rafiki the silverback mountain gorilla, leader of the Nkuringo mountain gorilla family and well known to many park visitors, by a poacher in June 2020 (Osipova et al, 2020; UWA, 2020).

Sites like BINP that protect great ape populations also face the additional risk of potential disease transmission from human visitors to their primate relatives. In a video message recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic, BINP management authorities undertaking core monitoring activities implemented precautionary measures, such as sanitising hands and wearing masks, to safeguard the gorilla population (UNESCO, 2021). In the PANORAMA Solution Mitigating Zoonotic Disease Transmission with a One Health approach to Gorilla Conservation and Gorilla Tourism, the conservation organisation Conservation Through Public Health (CTHP) further outlines how a One Health approach was implemented to safeguard both the health of the gorilla population and local communities, reporting a significant improvement in the general health of local communities, as well as of mountain gorillas (including no deaths from COVID-19), reducing pressure on natural resources, as well as CTPH and the International Gorilla Conservation Programme developing a policy brief including the compilation of recommendations for safe great ape viewing, based on research proven outcomes, which was endorsed by the Government of Uganda, partner NGOs in conservation and public health, and shared with the 13 other countries in Africa with great ape tourism. Further details are outlined in the PANORAMA Solution (Leakey, 2022).

This case study highlights not only the importance of a One Health approach to tourism, PCA and species management, but also of facilitating collaboration between public authorities, conservation organisations and tourism operators to ensure that sustainable tourism fundamentally ensures positive conservation outcomes.

It is important to facilitate and strengthen the capacity of management authorities, conservation NGOs, and expert networks like the IUCN SSC Wildlife Health Specialist Group and the Primate Specialist Group (IUCN SSC, 2021), to ensure a One Health approach to sustainable tourism and PCA management into the future.

- **UNESCO World Heritage List: Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda**
- **2020 IUCN World Heritage conservation outlook assessment**
- **PANORAMA Solution: Mitigating Zoonotic Disease Transmission with a One Health approach to Gorilla Conservation and Gorilla Tourism**
- **PANORAMA Solutions in focus: Wildlife Health and Zoonotic Disease Risk Reduction**
- **UNESCO COVID-19 site manager interviews**
### RECOMMENDATIONS

This white paper provides a synthesis of *Sustainable Tourism and Protected Areas in a Post-COVID World* project components including global findings, local case studies from PCAs around the world including World Heritage sites, experiences from communities in Peru and Viet Nam, as well as guidelines and best practices such as a holistic One Health approach to tourism in PCAs.

Whilst COVID-19 pandemic related impacts of tourism on PCAs around the world has been both positive and negative, there is a clear opportunity for decision makers and management practitioners to harness these experiences and use best practice sustainable tools and guidelines to invest in, support and finance effective, equitable and sustainable tourism within PCAs.

The following high-level recommendations aim to help practitioners ranging from tourism operators, policy makers, to local communities operating within and around PCAs to be able to achieve a sustainable approach to tourism practices that promote and enhance the protection of our world’s natural resources. More detailed case studies, best-practice principles and guidelines are highlighted throughout the white paper. It is hoped the recommendations will point to further investment and work in these areas, which will be central to the transformational changes needed in the dynamic between tourism and PCAs.

#### POLICY

- Create the legal, policy and incentive enabling conditions that encourage and support sustainable and equitable tourism practices in PCAs and build awareness and capacity to facilitate their implementation by site managers and PCA practitioners.
- Work with tourism infrastructure developers and financiers to develop clear guidance on appropriate scale low impact development and conversely identify types of large-scale tourism infrastructure that should be ‘no-go’ in PCAs.

#### TOURISM MANAGEMENT

- Harness the global, regional and local experiences of COVID-19 pandemic impacts on tourism and PCAs, both positive and negative, to inform tourism recovery and best practice sustainable tourism practices in PCAs going forward.
- Ensure that tourism planning, development and implementation (including the development of tourism recovery plans, rebuilding destinations, etc.) is based on best practice sustainable tourism and PCA management principles that safeguard and enhance natural values, including the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage sites.

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<tr>
<th>POLICY</th>
<th>TOURISM MANAGEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➞ Create the legal, policy and incentive enabling conditions that encourage and support</td>
<td>➞ Strengthen important Nature-Culture connections in tourism management, ensuring equitable rights-based governance processes that respect rights holders and</td>
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<td>sustainable and equitable tourism practices in PCAs and build awareness and capacity to</td>
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<td>facilitate their implementation by site managers and PCA practitioners.</td>
<td>➞ Ensure equitable and sustainable tourism management principles are integrated into core PCA planning and management systems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➞ Work with tourism infrastructure developers and financiers to develop clear guidance on</td>
<td>➞ Encourage PCA tourism business planning at PCA level that is embedded in overall conservation and protection objectives whilst fostering business oriented entrepreneurial approaches.</td>
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<td>appropriate scale low impact development and conversely identify types of large-scale tourism</td>
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<td>infrastructure that should be ‘no-go’ in PCAs.</td>
<td>➞ Ensure that tourism planning and decision making incorporates best practice impact assessment and planning tools, such as strategic environmental assessments (SEA) and environmental impact assessments (EIA), to assess potential impacts of tourism on natural values and avoid any development that would negatively impact on natural values.</td>
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COLLABORATIONS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

⇒ Invest in the capacity building of local practitioners, including protected area management staff, conservation organisations and local communities to work collaboratively with the tourism sector in achieving conservation outcomes.

⇒ Foster links and alliances between PCA and tourism practitioners to facilitate sustainable tourism and promote benefits, including investment in collaborative public-private sector research opportunities between PCA practitioners, the tourism industry and other stakeholders.

⇒ Scale up tourism marketing that generates business and communicates best-practice sustainable tourism based on conserving and protecting natural values and empowering local communities.

⇒ Identify and implement in collaboration with PCA managers and the tourism sector areas of mutually beneficial applied research.

FINANCE

Strengthen innovative financing mechanisms that return sustainable tourism revenue into management operations and support local communities.

Encourage innovation and investment in sustainable tourism operations (e.g. the expansion of virtual tourism opportunities to engage a wide audience in nature).

HEALTH

Implement a holistic One Health approach to tourism and PCA management in order to minimise and avoid future risk of zoonotic diseases in line with One Health Principles for Sustainable Tourism in Protected and Conserved Areas.
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