



# Building and operating biodiversity-friendly hotels



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Publications Services  
Rue Mauverney 28  
1196 Gland  
Switzerland  
Tel +41 22 999 0000  
Fax +41 22 999 0020  
books@iucn.org  
www.iucn.org/publications

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# ■ Biodiversity and hotels

Integrating biodiversity considerations in planning and operational decisions for hotel and resort is important not only for the continued viability and conservation of the ecosystems, but also for the long-term financial success of the hotels and resorts. The tourism industry, including the hospitality sector, depends strongly on healthy ecosystems, because those ecosystems – and the wildlife, habitats, landscapes and natural attractions that comprise them – are often the very thing that draws tourists to the destination in the first place.

Biodiversity is essential for human life. It provides human society with many important benefits and services: for instance, insects pollinate our crops, birds disperse seeds, and fungi, worms and micro-organisms produce nutrients and fertile soils. Interactions between organisms and the physical environment influence our climate, water supplies and air quality, and help protect us from extreme weather, including mitigation of natural disasters. These benefits are collectively known as ecosystem services (The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, <http://www.millenniumassessment.org>).

It is therefore not surprising that biodiversity plays an important role in the day-to-day life of a hotel: from the food in the restaurant and wood in furniture and fittings, to the amenities in the spa, the products of biodiversity are everywhere inside hotels. Outside, plants and animals make a hotel's public areas and gardens attractive for guests, while beyond the hotel gate, national parks, green spaces, coasts and natural habitats provide guests with opportunities for recreation and enjoyment.

Despite their dependence on and interconnectedness with biodiversity, hotels and resorts can have significant negative impacts on ecosystems and natural resources. A hotel impacts biodiversity at each stage of its life cycle, from planning through to closure:

- At the **planning stage**, the most important issue in determining the level of impact that a hotel will have relates to choices about its siting and design.

Choices about the materials that will be used to construct the hotel, where those materials will come from and the total physical footprint of the hotel will also influence how significant its impacts will be in the operational stage.

- At the **construction stage**, impact is determined by the size and location of the area cleared for development and where construction activities are taking place; the choice of construction methods; the sources and amount and type of materials, water and energy used to build the hotel; the location of temporary camps for construction workers; inadequate storage facilities for construction materials; the amount of construction waste that has to be disposed of; and other types of damage, such as surface soil erosion or compaction caused by construction activities or disruption of natural water flows and drainage patterns.
- In the **operational stage**, a hotel's impact comes mainly from the energy, water, food and other resources that are consumed in running the hotel; by the solid and liquid wastes it produces; by the way its grounds are managed and by the direct impacts of its guests. In addition, regular renovation and replacement of furniture, appliances and facilities can cause impacts through purchasing choices and increased waste generation. Using energy and water more efficiently; using organic and sustainably produced food; reducing, treating and disposing of waste appropriately; making sustainable purchasing decisions and managing gardens with natural-style plantings can all help a hotel to reduce its adverse impacts on biodiversity. Similarly, a hotel's relationship with host communities not only affects the sustainable operations of the hotel but also the use of environmental resources by communities themselves.
- At the **closure stage**, a hotel's impacts come from the disposal of materials removed from the hotel to refurbish it, convert it for other uses, or demolish it, and from the work involved in these activities. It may be possible to reuse and recycle some materials, but there may also be some toxic materials, particularly from older buildings, which will require careful handling and management. A responsible hotel operator should also foresee supporting activities of ecological restoration as required.

To specifically address the biodiversity risks associated with the development and operations of hotels and resorts, IUCN has developed the *Biodiversity Principles for siting and design of hotels and resorts* and *guidelines for the sustainable use of biological resources in hotels and resorts*.

# ■ Biodiversity Principles for siting and design of hotels and resorts

IUCN has developed a set of five Biodiversity Principles to promote the integration of biodiversity considerations into decision making on the planning, siting and design of hotels and resorts. These Principles have been developed based on the outcomes of an analysis conducted by IUCN of the current threats to biodiversity in the Caribbean linked to the siting and design of hotels and other vacation accommodation. The study generated evidence of biodiversity impacts resulting from the siting and design of hotels and at the same time identified examples of positive relationships (*Impacts of hotel siting and design on biodiversity in the insular Caribbean: A situation analysis*, IUCN, 2011, not in print).



The Biodiversity Principles for siting and design of hotels and resorts focus on how biodiversity and associated social impacts can be better addressed in hotel and resort development. The Principles seek to provide guidance in the planning and construction stages of the hotel life cycle. They are targeted at all relevant stakeholders, including planning authorities, tourism development agencies, developers, investors, hotel managers and management companies, project managers and consultants, architects and construction firms. It is also expected that these Principles will be integrated into relevant policy and planning processes, including Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP), national and local management plans, tourism development plans, and the environmental management strategies of hotel corporations and developers.



## **The five principles are:**

### **Principle 1: Adopt an ecosystem-based approach in tourism development planning**

*Hotel and resort planners and governmental agencies consider the dynamics of ecosystems, their services and interconnectivity when developing new hotels and resorts, and take into account the impacts that the development(s) could have on all components of the ecosystems concerned.*

### **Principle 2: Manage impacts on biodiversity from hotel development and attempt to achieve an overall positive contribution**

*Hotel and resort developers make all efforts to avoid negative impacts on biodiversity and associated livelihoods from siting, design and construction. When impacts are unavoidable, efforts are made to avoid the areas of greatest biodiversity value, minimize the extent of development impacts, restore affected ecosystems and biodiversity to the greatest extent possible, and invest in additional conservation actions within the vicinity of the development. Hotel and resort developers should aim to achieve a demonstrable, overall positive contribution to the conservation of local biodiversity.*

### **Principle 3: Design with nature and adopt nature-based solutions**

*Where possible, hotels and resorts blend into their natural landscape, enhance it, and use nature as a source of inspiration in design and in operations.*

### **Principle 4: Respect, involve and support local communities**

*Hotel and resort developments contribute positively to local community development, respect land rights and land-use rights of local stakeholders and involve them in decision making.*

### **Principle 5: Build collaboration among stakeholders**

*Reconciling hotel and resort development and biodiversity conservation can only be achieved with the participation of all parties concerned. Tourism development practitioners and national government authorities develop mechanisms – ad hoc and long-term – to support collaborative efforts that mobilize and foster the knowledge and capacities of all stakeholders.*

*Siting and Design of Hotels and Resorts: Principles and Case Studies for Biodiversity Conservation*, including the full text of the Principles and the Case Studies, is available from [www.iucn.org/publications](http://www.iucn.org/publications).

Thirteen case studies have been developed to illustrate how these Principles can be implemented.

**Principle 1:**

- Q-Station, Australia
- Tres Rios, Mexico
- Chumbe Island, Tanzania

**Principle 2:**

- North Island, Seychelles
- Isla Palenque, Panama
- Fairmont Mayakoba, Mexico

**Principle 3:**

- Bay of Fires, Australia
- Soneva Fushi, Maldives
- Maho Bay and Concordia, U.S. Virgin Islands

**Principle 4:**

- Misool Eco Resort, Indonesia
- Campi ya Kanzi, Kenya

**Principle 5:**

- El Nido and Taytay, Philippines
- Northeast Brazil, Brazil



# Integrating biodiversity into hotel and resort operations

During the operational stage, hotels and resorts can have significant impacts on biodiversity through their levels of energy and water usage, how they dispose of and manage wastewater and solid waste, and the purchasing and landscaping decisions they make.

There are many ways that hotel managers can minimize impacts on biodiversity in the different areas of a hotel:

- In **hotel restaurants**, seek sustainable sources of food supplies, especially of fish and seafood, fruits and vegetables, farmed meats and wild game. Local production is always preferable, with good practices applied in the production process.
- In **guest rooms and public areas**, make responsible choices in terms of wood used for expansion or renovation projects and furniture, medicinal and aromatic plants and amenities for spa products, and ornamental plants and animals for public areas.
- In **hotel souvenir shops**, avoid souvenirs produced from threatened or protected plant and animal species.
- In **hotel grounds and gardens**, use indigenous plants for landscaping, choosing species that can be maintained with low or no use of chemicals, and minimize light and noise.
- In the **destination**, promote responsible recreation activities and excursions and support local biodiversity conservation efforts.





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While specific practices will vary depending on the resource concerned or the specific area of the hotel, there are some key approaches that apply to all actions designed to minimize biodiversity impacts:

- **Work internally** to introduce management practices and procedures that contribute to biodiversity conservation. This includes designating individuals responsible for the effort, setting clear targets and monitoring your progress, providing training and incentives to staff, and offering explanations of actions and the motivations behind them to staff, guests, suppliers and stakeholders.
- Whenever possible, use products that are from **sustainably harvested and/or sustainably produced sources**, and, if relevant, are certified and labelled under certification schemes that include biodiversity criteria.
- **Work closely with other key players**, including suppliers, clients, and public authorities and local organisations to ensure that they support and promote the hotel's efforts to conserve biodiversity.

The Guide focuses in particular on the biodiversity implications of specific products (such as spa products, room amenities, food and drinks, souvenirs and furniture) and activities (such as landscaping and ground

## About TRAFFIC



TRAFFIC was established in 1976, with a mission of working to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature. TRAFFIC's vision is of a world in which trade in wild plants and animals is managed at sustainable levels without damaging the integrity of ecological systems and in such a manner that it makes a significant contribution to human needs, supports local and national economies and helps to motivate commitments to the conservation of wild species and their habitats. A global, research-driven and action-oriented network, TRAFFIC is governed by a steering committee composed of members of the network's partner organisations, WWF and IUCN, and also works in close cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). TRAFFIC ([www.traffic.org](http://www.traffic.org)) has about 100 staff members, based in nearly 30 countries worldwide.

*Biodiversity: My Hotel in Action – A guide to sustainable use of biological resources* and *Biodiversity: My Hotel in Action – A guide to sustainable use of biological resources in the Caribbean* are available from:  
[www.iucn.org/publications](http://www.iucn.org/publications).

maintenance, excursions, partnerships and sponsorships with other organizations). The guide suggests actions that a hotel can take to protect biodiversity and be biodiversity-friendly, with sections addressing the different area of hotel operations, including restaurants, guest rooms and public areas, hotel souvenir shops, hotel grounds and gardens, and the wider destination beyond the hotel's gates.

To complement the management advice, 13 Factsheets, developed by TRAFFIC, provide detailed information about procuring and using a variety of biological resources, from seafood to wood to plants.

A *Hotel Manager's Checklist*, a tool to conduct a self-assessment of a hotel's performance in relation to biodiversity and planning future actions and initiatives, is also available.

# Acknowledgments

## Project coordinators

Giulia Carbone (IUCN, Global Business and Biodiversity Programme)

Téa García-Huidobro and Deirdre Shurland (IUCN, Mesoamérica e Iniciativa Caribe)

## Authors of the various elements

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*The Biodiversity Principles for siting and design of hotels and resorts.* Gillian Cooper and Yves Renard, Green Park Consultants GPC Ltd.

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## English editor

Amy Sweeting


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Thad Mermer

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## **IUCN**

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IUCN works on biodiversity, climate change, energy, human livelihoods and greening the world economy by supporting scientific research, managing field projects all over the world, and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, with more than 1,200 government and NGO members and almost 11,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

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**INTERNATIONAL UNION  
FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE**

WORLD HEADQUARTERS  
Rue Mauverney 28  
1196 Gland, Switzerland  
mail@iucn.org  
Tel +41 22 999 0000  
Fax +41 22 999 0002  
[www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)



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