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Marine Tourism

# Developing and Promoting Sustainable Nature-based Tourism in the Coral Triangle



Mahonia Na Dari leads a group of 16 students to snorkel and learn about the reef. © Jürgen Freund/WWF

*A project by WWF and partners, with support from the Australian government, (2015-2017) to assist the six countries of the Coral Triangle in developing a regional approach to more sustainable nature-based tourism that supports the protection and sustainable use of high conservation value places.*

## Introduction

The Coral Triangle, which includes the coral reef rich countries of Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands, has over 130 million people living in coastal communities who are directly dependent on healthy coastal and marine resources for food and income. It is also a densely populated area of the world, with rich, highly diverse cultures built on the peoples' connection to the ocean. It is also a region renowned for the beauty and uniqueness of its tropical marine environment.

The Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) is focused on improving food security, livelihoods, and income provision through the protection of the marine resources that directly support these people.

Under Australia's support of the CTI-CFF, we have developed a business case and a range of tools for governments, the private sector and communities to invest in nature-based tourism in the Coral Triangle. In doing so, we are addressing the challenge of how to develop livelihoods for Coral Triangle communities and businesses without undermining its rich environmental and cultural assets.



Ataúro Island © Kevin Austin / CT Heritage Foundation

The global Nature and Adventure Travellers market is growing rapidly as more people seek to minimise their tourism and travel footprint. It is a niche, low-volume, high-yield market which supports high-conservation value areas. In contrast to mass tourism, it can help generate a sustainable source of income from the natural and cultural assets of an area and reward local communities and businesses.

Under this project, the business opportunity of a Coral Triangle brand for nature-based tourism was presented to Coral Triangle governments and the private sector.

The arrangements needed to govern a Coral Triangle brand for nature based tourism were developed, including a 'screening tool'. Case-study 'destination plans' were developed for three tourism ventures in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste and an investment prospectus was also developed.

To support the awareness and promotion of the destinations and the investment opportunities, the destination plans and investment prospectus are featured on the multi-media platform

[www.thecoraltriangle.com](http://www.thecoraltriangle.com)



*“Investing in nature-based tourism in suitable sites throughout the Coral Triangle could deliver a potential US\$1.46–1.88 trillion per annum in total socio-economic and environmental value by 2035 at an average weighted ROI of 14.5–16.5% (vs. 8.5–10% for mass tourism)”.*

Baseline Analysis, 2017

## Our Approach

The project built the business case for Nature-based tourism with a baseline assessment and compared the return on investment for mass tourism versus nature-based tourism.

The **baseline analysis** concluded that the region presents a very significant and growing opportunity for investment in this rapidly emerging tourism segment with the potential to provide socioeconomic growth in all of the countries, whilst helping address some of the growing negative economic, social, environmental, and cultural impacts that mass tourism currently has on the region as well.

Next, the project developed a vision, standards and the foundational principles for a 'Coral Triangle Nature-Based Tourism Brand' that was signed on to by the CTI-CFF.

*“A sustainable and low-impact tourism industry flourishes and supports vibrant communities, strong local economies, and contributes to the conservation of the outstanding marine and coastal environment of the Coral Triangle”.*

Nature-based tourism project vision

# Why develop a brand?



Identify and highlight the point of difference of the Coral Triangle from other global destinations



Improve opportunities to achieve cut-through in a highly competitive and growing market



Showcase the significance of the Coral Triangle – why it is special and unique; and



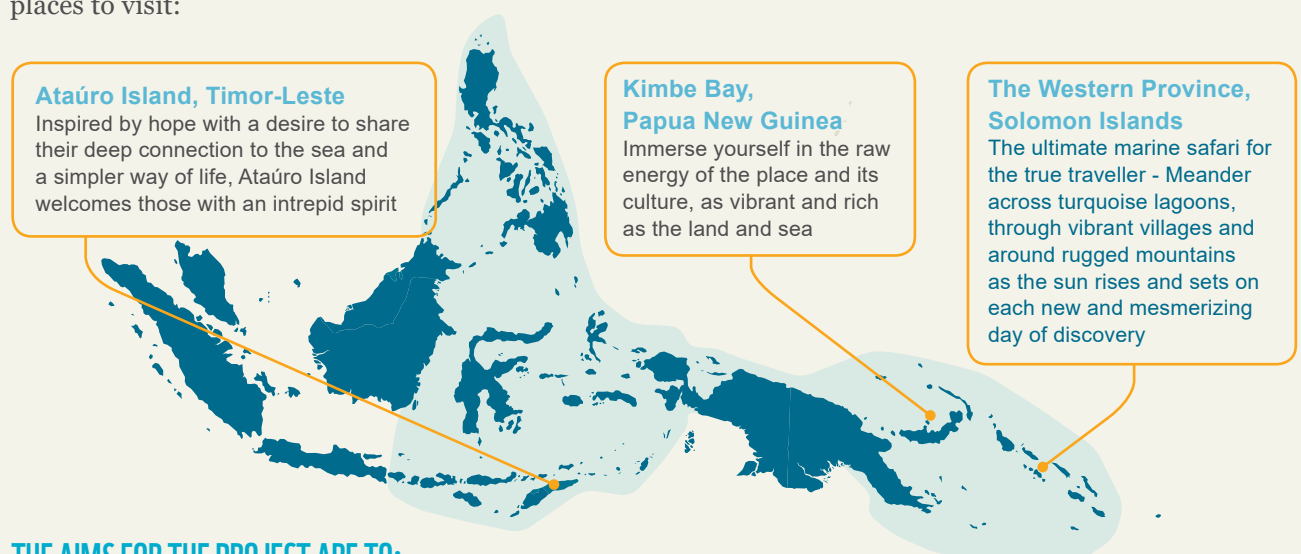
Act as a catalyst to help each country overcome some of the specific challenges they face in tourism development

## Principles agreed on

1. Conservation of natural and cultural values is paramount to the long-term sustainability of the region for its community and visitors;
2. The visitor experience will be grounded in the culture and nature of the site;
3. Planned growth in tourism will be respectful of local culture;
4. Community benefits will be achieved through the delivery of tourism opportunities;
5. Protection of marine and coastal resources will be improved through building awareness with the local community and tourists/visitors;
6. The site's character will be retained through effective design, planning, and management of infrastructure; and
7. Development of new visitor experiences and infrastructure should be informed by an understanding of the needs and expectation of the target market (visitor-centric approach) and involve robust and consultative master planning and feasibility analysis to ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

## Test Case of the Brand and the Principles

To test these in support of the vision, with relevant governments, community stakeholders and the private sector, **destination plans** were created for a selection of key destinations in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste. The site positioning for these destinations clearly distinguishes them as unique places to visit:



### THE AIMS FOR THE PROJECT ARE TO:



Promote world class, high quality visitor experiences



Enhance the value of tourism to local, regional, and national economies



Increase the role of marine protected areas in those economies and local communities



Build support for protecting our natural and cultural assets





© James Morgan / WWF

## Governance of the brand and screening of other tourism ventures

For future expansion to include other destinations for development and promotion under a Coral Triangle tourism brand, a screening 'governance' process and tool was established for the CTI-CFF.

### WHERE NEXT

An [investment prospectus](#) has been developed to help raise interest for nature-based tourism opportunities identified in this project that are very specific and affordable. Already, the project has been able to identify a number of investment opportunities and these are being investigated by WWF and will need to be further progressed by the National and Provincial governments of the three focal countries and ideally, by CTI-CFF development partners.

Further development and promotion of the Coral Triangle nature-based tourism brand is needed for the **'best of the best'** – high-quality, low-impact, sustainable nature-based tourism destinations within the region. These sites will appeal to higher-yield markets.

The activation of the Coral Sustainable Triangle Tourism Taskforce as a key entity for the implementation and operation of the governance framework needs urgent attention. Its task includes a sustainable financing

mechanism/trust fund to support sustainable marine and nature-based tourism in CT.

The screening tool that was developed for this project to help identify additional sites to be included in the CTI nature-based tourism framework needs to be developed in full as an on-line tool.

An important regional action that would provide significant benefit to the Coral Triangle countries is the development of a practical set of development and operational guidelines that would address the tourism and environmental aspirations of the countries. The CTI-CFF has already agreed to use Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria for locally adapted standards for marine tourism development in MPAs. Assistance to develop a regional set of guidelines to meet the GSTC criteria as recommended in the investment prospectus would be a valuable early win for development of nature-based tourism in the Coral Triangle.

### The Consultant Team

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#### Why are we here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

[panda.org/coraltriangle](http://panda.org/coraltriangle)

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