

New research shows a global trend in nature-based tourism

June 30 2009

A new study out today found that many nations throughout the world, including the United Kingdom, are seeing an annual increase in visitors to their conservation areas.

The research, published today (29 June) in the journal *PLoS Biology*, found that in 15 of the 20 countries for which information was available there was an increase in the number of visitors to their nature reserves. This has important implications for nations who are reliant on nature-related tourism to generate funds for conservation, as well as for engaging the public about the importance of conserving biodiversity.

Professor Andrew Balmford, Professor of Conservation Science at the University of Cambridge and lead author of the study said: "Nature-based tourism is one of the most tangible benefits that people derive from conserving biodiversity. Unfortunately it is often remarkably poorly quantified. When a study based on visit rates to American and Japanese nature reserves last year showed these were declining, it prompted widespread concerns that the public was falling out of love with nature. However, this report refutes this contention."

For the study, the researchers compiled and then analysed a database with far broader geographical coverage than previous ones. Their findings show that since the 1990s, while visitor numbers have been falling slightly in the US and Japan, these results are exceptional: in three-quarters of the 20 countries analysed, visitation to [nature reserves](#) is increasing - in some countries by as much as 7 or 8 per cent per year. In

Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America the increases were on average positive and the United Kingdom saw an average 3 per cent annual increase.

It is believed that the previous results for the US and Japan arose because the growth in nature-based tourism is linked with wealth, with visit rates increasing fastest in the poorest countries (such as Ghana, Madagascar and India), and growing more slowly in richer ones, eventually falling below zero in the richest nations.

Professor Balmford explains: "We don't yet have the data to understand why this link with wealth arises. It could be because affluence leads to a rise in sedentary alternatives to nature-based pastimes, such as TV or the Internet, but other explanations - such as a shift from increasingly overcrowded reserves to quieter nature areas nearby where visitors are not counted, or even to overseas reserves - are equally plausible."

Professor Balmford concludes: "The trends demonstrated in the paper underscore the point that nature-based tourism generally remains extremely popular and is in most places still growing quickly.

"There are many places where large-scale nature tourism is not feasible, and there are important concerns to be addressed about the potential negative impacts of tourism on local people and on the environment. But despite these caveats, we believe nature-based [tourism](#) continues to offer an important route to linking [conservation](#) with sustainable development."

More information: The paper 'A Global Perspective on Trends in Nature-Based Tourism' will be published in the 29 June 2009 online edition of [PLoS Biology](#).

Source: University of Cambridge ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: New research shows a global trend in nature-based tourism (2009, June 30) retrieved 28 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-06-global-trend-nature-based-tourism.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.