



Saving coral reefs becomes a tourism priority

From the South Pacific to the Caribbean, coral reefs – some of the most delicate of marine ecosystems – are being damaged by climate change and other human activities, including coastal development, deforestation, and unrestricted tourism. Now, many in the tourist industry are trying to halt¹ the damage.

And it is no wonder. The dollars involved in reef-based tourism are significant: Australia's Great Barrier Reef alone draws² about 1.9 million visitors a year, supporting a \$4.2 billion industry. Growing awareness of environmental issues means that the tourism industry has lately been a partner to conservation efforts in major reef areas. Though the Great Barrier is the most famous reef, it is not the most threatened; its extensive marine management program is widely regarded as a model for conservation. It includes eco-certification programs for tourism operators within the boundaries³ of the marine park, environmental tourist fees⁴, large no-take zones⁵, species monitoring, and tourism industry contributions to the Great Barrier Reef's main research centre.

But the world's second-largest barrier reef, the Mesoamerican Reef in the Caribbean, is seriously endangered by coastal development, runoff⁶, and pollution. The reef system stretches nearly 700 miles from the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico to the Bay Islands of Honduras.

And reefs in the Coral Triangle in Southeast Asia – which reaches from Malaysia to the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Solomon Islands, encompassing some of the planet's most diverse marine habitats – have been severely damaged by overfishing and destructive practices to capture fish.

The cruise industry is a particular area of concern, since ships regularly disgorge⁷ crowds of passengers into fragile coastal areas that strain⁸ to absorb the impact. Conservation International estimates that cruise passengers typically make about 2,000 scuba dives in and around Cozumel's surrounding reefs in a single day. In 2004, the non-profit group Conservation International began a program called the Mesoamerican Reef Tourism Initiative, which aims to address the threat that mass tourism poses to the Mesoamerican Reef by engaging hoteliers, developers, cruise lines and local governments in Mexico, Belize, and Honduras.

To keep coral reefs from disappearing as quickly as they have in recent years, people need to be involved and educated on every level from local government to hotel developers to cruise lines, said Mr Sweeting of Conservation International.

(Adapted from www.nytimes.com)



GLOSSARY

- 1** to stop, to limit
- 2** attracts
- 3** lines marking the limits
- 4** taxes
- 5** fully protected areas
- 6** eliminated waste products from manufacturing processes
- 7** discharge
- 8** strive hard

ACTIVITIES

1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 Where are the main coral reefs?
- 2 What damages coral reefs?
- 3 Why are many in the tourist industry trying to limit the damage to coral reefs?
- 4 What is Conservation International and what are its aims?