Supporting Reef Conservation
How Tourism Professionals and Tourists Can Help!
Coral Reef Tourism
The MAR has some of the best dive destinations in the world. Every year, Scuba Diving Magazine reveals its Readers Choice Awards. In 2018, divers rated Cozumel, Roatán, and Belize in the top 5 for “Best Scuba Diving Overall” in the Caribbean/Atlantic.
Coral Reef Tourism: An Opportunity

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world.

350 million people travel to coral reef coasts every year.

Coral reefs are a major tourist attraction.

In 2018, about 10 million tourists visited Cozumel, Roatán, and Belize.
Benefits of Coral Reef Tourism

Is non-extractive (uses the reef without removing resources)

Can provide a sustainable livelihood for local communities

Can help generate income for MPA management

Can raise awareness about coral reefs and the threats facing them
Sustainable vs. Unsustainable

Sustainable tourism:
- Provides economic benefits to local communities.
- Respects cultural values.
- Minimizes environmental impact.

Unsustainable tourism:
- Provides limited economic benefits to communities.
- Disrespects cultural values.
- Degrades and destroys the natural resources that support the economy of a region.
Attitudes Matter

• What’s considered “appropriate” behavior changes over time.

• The role of the tourism professional is to covert the visitor’s mentality from that of a tourist to one of a responsible tourist.

• The best way to enjoy a reef is to slow down, relax, and respectfully observe the creatures going about their lives.
Tourism Professionals Can Make A Difference!

- Following best practices
- Educating tourists about the reefs, their fragility, and how to respect them
- Providing in-water supervision to ensure tourists are respectful and following guidelines; intervening if necessary
- Being a responsible boater
- Modeling appropriate behavior for tourists by “practicing what you preach”
1. Following Best Practices
Limiting Tour Group Sizes

You can make better choices before even leaving the shore:

- Keep tour groups small so you can provide proper supervision and not overwhelm the reef.
- Smaller groups receive a more intimate, curated experience and are more likely to give tips!
Safety First

Follow Standard Operating Procedures, including ensuring that:

- Someone on the boat is First Aid and CPR certified.
- For snorkel trips, everyone aboard has a life-jacket.
- For dive trips, someone on the boat is Oxygen Provider and AED certified.
- You are always aware of local weather conditions.
Support Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

- Be informed about and communicate local laws and regulations.
- Encourage tourists to:
  - Pay voluntary dive fees.
  - Shop merchandise and food from local, sustainable businesses.
  - Donate to local non-profit initiatives.
2. Educating Tourists
Educating Tourists

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Best Environmental Practices: Snorkeling & Diving

As A Responsible Visitor:
- Choose to stay in an eco-certified hotel or resort that operates with sustainability policies.
- Choose dive operators that are actively involved in reef conservation efforts.
- Choose dive operators who use monofilament and monofilament props.
- Avoid purchasing souvenirs made from marine life, including mollusks and starfishes. Buy only things that are safe to buy and that do not support the illegal trade.

While in the Water:
- Never touch, feed, or interact with the reef in a manner or a distance from the reef at all risks.
- Take nothing—only water out of the water, and nothing of the reef back on land.
- Do not touch, feed, or feed marine life.
- Avoid a range of practices that could lead to marine life loss.

Save Our Reefs:
- Keep your equipment, even if you are awake, when not in use.
- Avoid using equipment when not in use, as it can cause stress to the ecosystem.

CORAL REEF ALLIANCE
Conduct An Environmental Briefing

Things to include:

- Background information on coral reef ecology, value, and threats
- The fragility of coral reefs
- Local laws and regulations
- Rules for conducting oneself on the boat and in the water
- Explanation/justification for why the rules are important
- How to support the local culture and conservation initiatives
Encourage Eco-Friendly Practices

Tourism professionals can encourage tourists to make sustainable choices, such as:

- Avoiding the purchase of corals or other marine animals as souvenirs.
- Purchasing sustainable seafood.
- Using reef-friendly sunscreens or a rashguard.
Benefits of Educating Tourists

- Appreciation of the beauty and complexity of coral reef ecosystems
- Respect for the value of coral reefs
- Empowerment to make informed decisions
- Motivation to participate in, or support, coral reef conservation
3. Providing In-Water Supervision
No Touching, No Taking

Important rules for tourists:

- Don’t touch corals.
- Don’t stand on or kick reefs.
- Don’t collect sand or shells.
- Do collect trash in the water and dispose of it properly!
Respectful Wildlife Viewing

You should ensure that tourists:

- Never feed or touch marine wildlife
- Maintain a safe distance and never chase, crowd around, circle, or try to ride animals
- Ask before taking photographs and/or using a strobe
Eco-Friendly Diving

Ensure that divers:

- Stay off the bottom
- Never touch or balance on reefs
- Avoid using gloves or knee-pads
- Only use advanced photography equipment if they are very experienced
Eco-Friendly Diving

Key factors for diver safety and reef safety:

- Neutral buoyancy
  - The BC for +buoyancy
  - Weights for –buoyancy
  - Breath control for fine tuning of body position in the water

- Fin awareness, since fin kicks is the leading diver-caused form of reef damage

- Well-secured equipment
Eco-Friendly Snorkeling

Snorkelers can potentially be more damaging than divers because:
- It’s common for them to visit reefs in bigger groups
- They are generally less experienced.

You can help by:
- Always providing snorkelers with a life vest.
- Choosing sites with proper depth so they can’t stand on the reef.
- Explaining best snorkeling practices.
Cozumel Monitoring Study

The findings showed that contact with the reef:

- Was mostly fin kicks.
- Occurred typically in the first 10 minutes.
- Appeared largely unintentional (82%).
- Was higher when people were taking photographs.

In-water supervision and intervention works!
4. Being A Responsible Boater
Proper Boat Operation

Tourism professionals must operate boats responsibly. You can do this by:

- Navigate carefully
- Avoid fast motoring near reef areas
- Use proper mooring systems; avoid dropping anchors on coral reefs
Proper Boat Maintenance

- Use clean-burning 4-stroke outboard engines when possible
- Use eco-friendly cleaning products
- Use non-toxic antifouling bottom paints
- Perform regular checks on engines and fuel tanks to avoid leaks
Proper Waste Disposal

- Use wastewater pump-out facilities to dispose of sewage.
- Never release oily bilge water into the water.
- Never release hazardous waste (e.g. cleaning agents, batteries, paint) into the water.
Proper Trash Disposal

- “Leave no trace.”
- Don’t throw anything overboard.
- Never use Styrofoam or single-use plastics.
- Collect any floating debris you encounter.
- Dispose of trash properly on land.
5. Modeling Appropriate Behavior
Role models are critical to changing attitudes and behaviors.

- When tourists see their guides following regulations, they are more likely to do so as well.

- Don’t violate rules that you’ve asked your guests to follow (e.g. interacting with wildlife).
A Cautionary Tale

● This guide posted a photo of himself holding a splendid toadfish on Facebook.

● He was called out by the online community.

● He lost his job and was no longer allowed to work in Cozumel.
Never Stop Learning!

A knowledgeable and well-trained guide is an incredible resource and asset. Try to:

- Learn all you can about coral reefs.
- Improve your language and communication skills.
- Keep yourself trained and current.
YOU Can Make A Difference.

Take advantage of your unique position as tourism professionals by:

- Remaining curious
- Raising awareness about the importance of coral reefs
- Showing your guests a fun and eco-friendly way of enjoying coral reefs
- Sharing your knowledge and experiences.
This is your home and your legacy!
Sources
Facts and Figures

“In 2018, divers rated Cozumel, Roatán, and Belize in the top 5 for “Best Scuba Diving Overall” in the Caribbean/Atlantic.”
Source: https://www.scubadiving.com/BEST-SCUBA-DIVING-PLACES-2018

“In 2018, about 10 million tourists visited Cozumel, Roatán, and Belize.”

“350 million people travel to coral reef coasts every year”

Findings of the Cozumel Monitoring Study