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UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Online Toolkit

Guide 1 Understanding tourism at your destination



Welcome to the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit

Sustainable planning and management of tourism is one of the most pressing challenges concerning the future of the World Heritage Convention today and is the focus of the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme.

These 'How To' guides for World Heritage Site managers and other key stakeholders will enable a growing number of World Heritage Site communities to make positive changes to the way they pro-actively manage tourism.

How to use this guide

These easily accessible 'How To' guides are focused on best practice approaches to sustainable economic development through tourism. The first of their kind, the 'How To' resources offer direction and guidance to managers of World Heritage tourism destinations and other stakeholders to help identify the most suitable solutions for circumstances in their local environments and aid in developing general know-how for the management of each destination.

The 'How To' guides bring best practice knowledge to the full WH community, so that site managers, tourism professionals, conservation professionals, and communities around the world understand the possibilities of sustainable tourism and what key issues have already been achieved.

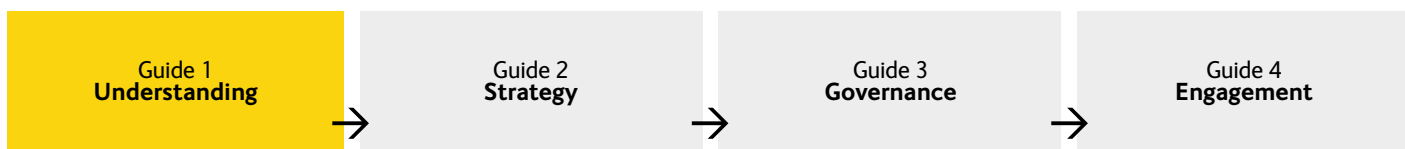
These resources are a valuable asset to site managers in particular, who often lack the tools and know-how to effectively manage and maximise tourism benefits, while minimising its negative impacts.

Our series of guides have been structured as a step-by-step process for site managers.

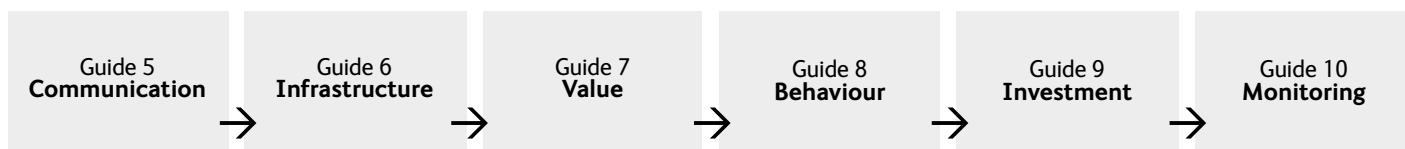
Guides 1-4 establish the basic foundations for sustainable tourism (these are coloured yellow).

Guides 5-10 are tailored to more specific issues, which will have greater relevance at some sites than at others (these are coloured orange). We recommend that site managers explore each guide, however, as sustainable tourism is a holistic process, addressing all issues in a strategic manner.

Strategic Foundations



Core Delivery (Only works if steps 1 to 4 are undertaken)



Our Objective

The goal is to stimulate local solutions in communities through capacity-building in best practice. With the immense scale and variation of World Heritage Properties around the globe, coupled with scarce human and financial resources, this is now more important than ever. Site managers and other stakeholders in the tourism sector must have access to these types of innovative sustainability tools in order to develop and formulate their own successful results.

Ideally, site managers and other users will begin to navigate through this system by learning basic ideas and guidance. The system then enables the user to delve deeper into any given subject that falls in line with their local interests, needs, and aspirations.

Our objective for these guidance resources is to enable the growth and success of an entire community of World Heritage Properties, making positive changes to their local surroundings and pro-actively managing tourism in their areas. In parallel, by establishing this community, we aim to facilitate knowledge exchange of the most progressive ideas, and encourage their implementation and evolution.

The driving ethic for the 'How To' guides is to explain critically important ideas for sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites in a clear and concise manner, conveying the key knowledge and processes in a reading time of under 20 minutes per idea. Our goal is to make implementing the ideas of sustainable tourism easier to understand and put into practice for all parties involved.

Getting started

We understand the complex range of different societies in which World Heritage sites exist, and the many challenges site managers face on a daily basis. While the intention is to encourage each site to undertake most, or at least many, of the tasks included in the guides, considering them together all at once may seem daunting and even impossible.

We have developed this tool as a source of guidance and inspiration. It is a menu of ideas from which you, the user, may choose to put into practice, helping your World Heritage site become more sustainable for its current and future visitors.

Getting to know these 'How To' guides will move your site towards better self-management and sustainability rather than demand a level of sophistication that might simply be unattainable for some World Heritage sites. We would urge all site managers to read through these resources thoroughly and begin to think about what positive steps can be taken to implement these changes. Again, we remind each user that results will differ for each site, and the circumstances of the local environment and community must always be taken into consideration.

Sustainability is a complex system to navigate. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the information provided in the 'How To' guides, or send us your feedback. We are here to help.

Guide 1: What this guide will tell you

This guide will help you understand why tourism matters, some key questions you may need to ask and answer, and some ways to fill evidence gaps, such as utilising other partner's resources. Continue reading below to follow our steps to success.

Why this matters

Every business school in the world teaches, **'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it'**. You cannot manage tourism or help shape it in progressive ways without having a basic understanding of what it is, how it affects people and places, and what it can potentially become with some inspired and progressive interventions. To ensure the scarce resources available for tourism development and heritage protection are utilised to their full effect, it is crucial a unified understanding exists across each destination regarding what is successful, what does not work, and what sustainable opportunities exist for growth or development. **Not all tourism is good tourism**; some forms of tourism are much more sustainable, while others may have a negative effect on the surrounding environment if not managed properly.

Almost all potential sites can benefit from **better evidence and data** – this is not just a heritage management issue, but a tourism destination issue. It is necessary you **work to gather this information**. Other places similar to your sites have successfully addressed these questions, and often with limited resources. You may find the examples most relevant to your situation in our Resources page.

Start with the basics – define your terms of reference

Be clear on where and what your 'destination' is.

A destination is the physical space in which a tourist spends their holiday or vacation. **It includes a full range of services, products and experiences:**

The attractions people visit

The accommodation in which they stay

The transport arrival hubs

The food and drink establishments utilised

The retail outlets in which they shop

The museums and galleries they visit

Even the city, town, village, or homes where the local community resides.

A World Heritage site (WHS) can be a destination in itself. However, more often it is located in, or part of, a wider venue, forming **the key**, or one of the key, attractions of the place concerned. The UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme is based on the need to manage tourism at a **destination scale** – managing the issues simply within the boundaries of the World Heritage sites would be ineffective.

Defining your broader destination is extremely important in building foundations for sustainable tourism, and it can be particularly helpful to look at how other places have done this already. **For example**, Angkor Wat WHS is the attraction, but Siem Reap is the destination, or Uluru Kata Tjuta WHS (formerly known as Ayers Rock) is the attraction, while Alice Springs is the destination.

We offer guidance below that addresses tourism challenges at a destination scale. Therefore, it will be important to **know and understand the geography of your location** - where it begins and also where it ends.

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“Understanding tourism is the first step to managing your site more effectively. Surprisingly, few World Heritage sites collect accurate data on key tourism indicators. **Good data is the key** to both being able to monitor threats to the site or the host community, and ensuring interventions are effectively targeted.

How much do you know about the destination?

Here are some basic questions you will need to answer about your destination. It may be useful to list your answers in a separate document to refer back to later.

Can you answer all of the following?:

How many tourists do you receive per year?

How long do they stay in your destination?

Who are your tourists? Where do they come from?

Are you attracting the most advantageous segments of the tourism market? How do you perform relative to other comparable destinations?

How do tourists arrive and move around your destination?

Where do they go to afterwards?

What are their motivations for coming? What do they know about your site?

What do they care about? Do they understand your outstanding universal value (OUV)?

What are the positive and negative social, economic, cultural, and ecological impacts caused by visitors? How do they affect the heritage management of the site?

Where, and by whom or what, are these impacts experienced?

How many people can your site/destination sustainably cope with and manage?

Do you understand the scale, quality, capacity, and location of your tourism infrastructure (hotels, restaurants, travel providers, food and drink, leisure, retail)?

How do your visitors spend their money? Who benefits from this spending? Who does not benefit?

Who picks up the costs of the heritage?

Who or what entity must be part of a partnership that would bring about positive changes to your destination?

If you cannot answer these questions, or similar questions specific to your site, you must **dedicate some time** to trying to find these answers **before** attempting to change anything. These answers will help you gather the necessary information to begin managing tourism in your location at a destination scale.

3. The four crucial issues you need to measure and understand, and why

Understanding tourism is the first step to managing your site more effectively. Surprisingly, few World Heritage sites collect accurate data on key tourism indicators. **Good data is the key** to both being able to monitor threats to the site or the host community, and ensuring interventions are effectively targeted. The following four topics are crucial to fully understanding tourism possibilities at your destination.

1) Supply side

To manage tourism effectively, destinations need to understand the **supply side of the process** – which involves undertaking an inventory of tourism assets and infrastructure, while assessing the scope for growth and the changes over time. The effectiveness of a destination **relies on securing revenue and is heavily dependent** upon the location, scale, capacity, and quality of the accommodation, transport system, food and drink, retail, leisure experiences, and visitor attractions. **Every destination** should have a simple and up to date inventory of its tourism assets and visitor attractions.

2) Demand side

How many people want to visit? Is the demand growing or declining?

Who are the visitors, and when do they visit?

Why do they come, and how long do they stay?

How much do they spend and what do they purchase?

Where do they come from?

What do they want to experience, and how do they learn about the site, its values, and the host community?

Are visitors satisfied with the experience?

How is all of this changing over time, and does the destination attract the most advantageous visitor segments?

This information is crucial because **you may need to use it later for new investment possibilities and new or updated infrastructure**. All destinations should at the very least measure visitor satisfaction levels.

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3) Community voice – community impacts

It is critical that destinations think carefully about the **potential positive and negative impacts** that tourism may have on the host community and their intangible cultural heritage. **Communicate** with the host community to understand their needs, concerns, and aspirations. It is a **basic tenet of sustainable tourism** that host communities have a voice in shaping the tourism processes that affect them. There is tendency to think about the community's wishes after everything has already been decided – this is a grave mistake and one likely to breed mistrust and apathy on the part of local residents.

4) Heritage, cultural, social, and ecological impacts

Perhaps the most important issue when talking about World Heritage sites is **understanding the heritage** – what can and cannot happen in its proximity. We would hope that every site has a Heritage Management Plan that is clear about the impacts and opportunities that result from tourism, as well as the areas of concern and issues to be addressed. It is critical for effective heritage management that destination personnel **understand and monitor the past, present, and potential future** ecological, cultural, and social impacts of tourism. In many sites there will be ways to sustainably manage tourism and tourism growth, but site managers need to understand the point at which impacts are destructive and require intervention. The degree to which tourism businesses provide local career opportunities (with fair wages), equal opportunities, and occupational safety are important and worthy of analysis. **Think carefully about 'liveability'** as well as the visitor experience. It is also important to monitor risks and negative impacts over time so that areas of concern can be managed in the appropriate way at the appropriate times.

These four areas of action are critical to effective destination management. Every World Heritage site destination should evaluate their knowledge and understanding on these issues. This is not simply some form of onerous conservation regulation. **It is as much about developing and managing the destination** for the benefit of its businesses and host community, as **it is about raising awareness** concerning what can and cannot happen at sites recognised as the world's most important and valued historic places or natural landscapes.

“Create a simple inventory of the available evidence on tourism issues in the destination. This will save a lot of time for stakeholders and is a useful exercise for a conservation or management body, as well as for a commercial business.”

4. Bring together the key data and evidence on your destination in one place

Create a simple inventory of the available evidence on tourism issues in the destination. This will save a lot of time for stakeholders and is a useful exercise for a conservation or management body, as well as for a commercial business.

Knowledge and understanding is powerful so spread it across the destination. Most tourism macro data is not market sensitive. It can usually be shared and analysed publicly with no ill effects for the destination (though it may reveal certain weaknesses or difficulties if the destination is doing things less well than it should be). Surprisingly few World Heritage destinations can answer any or all of these questions with any supporting evidence. We would, therefore, recommend that you bring together any **available evidence** on the destination and make it accessible, as it **will empower businesses and others** to think strategically about the performance of the tourism sector.

5. Assess objectively whether enough is known about tourism in your destination

What are the gaps in your knowledge and evidence?

It will become apparent relatively quickly which key questions you cannot answer with the evidence currently available. **Make a simple list** of the topics you know and understand. Continue with a list of those you do not know, but think would be useful to know. This list is rather **important for the stages that follow** because you will be able to **engage other partners** in helping you fill the information gaps you find.

6. Who can fill the data/evidence gaps?

Identify, link, and connect different stakeholders who have an interest in better tourism. There are many ways to collect data without spending a large sum of money. Many World Heritage sites will be able to **establish relationships** with local or international universities, colleges, and schools, as well as private businesses willing to devote time, effort, and money to understanding tourism and its associated issues with supporting evidence. If all else fails, **engaging interns and volunteers** to use simple but robust survey techniques can shed light on the tourism market for the destination as a whole.

The point is that often there are **other organisations willing** to use the destination as a research location, creating a **mutually beneficial relationship** for all parties involved. Some destinations already have established Evidence and Impact Forums for interested specialist parties and academics; if asked, a surprisingly wide range of stakeholders could be interested in helping you undertake this research.

7. Some ways to get started

Do not be daunted by the number of things you do not know... **begin your evidence gathering and analysis.** You may even start to answer some of the key questions by simply buying a clipboard, standing on the street, and asking visitors some polite questions. If you can **ask** a couple hundred visitors **the right questions**, then you will begin formulating insights into tourism at your destination. Likewise, if you contact around 20 tourism businesses **via face-to-face interviews or through an online survey**, you will begin to create a picture of what is happening at your destination, what is working, and what is not. Simple observations can reveal a great deal – **get a map and mark observations** concerning crowding, litter, deterioration of the historic environment, or poor visitor experiences. Your efforts may not meet the highest standards of social science, but this is not important.

Some destinations will, of course, be well resourced to hire professional teams of experts to undertake robust analysis of these issues – and that is to be encouraged where possible – but most destinations have to do their best with a range of practical, DIY, and partner solutions. **We are not demanding perfect analysis.** Rather, we are arguing that **some form is essential.** If you are lacking an available human workforce, you may encourage visitors to fill out a short survey when booking with hotels or agencies, or leave one in their hotel rooms. **If incentivised**, perhaps with the possibility of winning tickets to a local show or a free dinner, it has been shown that **people are far more likely** to complete such surveys. The luckiest, or best-managed locations may already have a destination management organisation happy to lead a data gathering project on tourism, and their work may simply need to be influenced by heritage professionals to widen its scope.

As you gather new evidence make it public. However small your samples or tentative your conclusions, you should make these public so **others can respond**, help you widen the survey base, or simply disagree with your findings and replace the information with something better. Knowledge is never perfect or finished; it is the process of learning and finding the information that matters. **Have a look** at the Manager's Forum on this site to post your own topic for response, or to see what other individuals are discussing.

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8. Assess sustainability meaningfully- can tourism ever be sustainable at your site?

Now that you are collecting and analyzing data, **consider whether there are ways other than tourism** to share your site and give your community a good quality of life. The global environment faces profound challenges due to our addiction to travel and the **consumption of resources at unsustainable levels.** Planes, trains, cars, and other forms of transport are a significant contributor to climate change through the burning of fossil fuels, and many communities face significant challenges in terms of water usage and the disposal of waste water and other solid wastes. The world is experiencing unprecedented levels of species extinction through habitat loss for food production, pollution, and over fishing, so **now more than ever you need to assess** whether you can justify tourism. If you are, in fact, able to do so, assess what kind of tourism can be accommodated that does not contribute negatively to the situation, either directly on a local basis **or through externalities** (e.g. CO₂ emissions) on a global basis.

We need a new kind of tourism that does not contribute to environmental damage, climate change, pollution, and loss of ecosystems. Some sites are already making the tough decision not to open complete access to visitors. Instead they have chosen to share their stories and values through a greater online presence, or offering remote access to the site with accompanying narrative guides– for instance, St Kilda in Scotland is one example. When gathering data to understand tourism in your destination **do not duck the toughest question of all – face it and think about it.** If the need for tourism is so great and is effectively unavoidable for your community, then think about how you can manage or prevent its direct effects on a local basis. In parallel, find ways to offset or mitigate its externalities on a global basis, such as a scheme for carbon offsetting.

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Guide 1 Case study

Historic Town of Vigan (Philippines)

Baseline situation

Vigan is an exceptionally intact and well-preserved example of a European trading town in East and South-East Asia. The architecture of the city reflects its historic roots and rich culture in both materials and design, fusing Asian building design and construction with European colonial architecture and planning.

However, **prior to its inscription** to the World Heritage List (1999), the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the site was in serious danger. Only four years before, in 1995, **there was a legacy of political instability**, private armies and political violence, out-migration of businesses, and decay of the historic district. Traditional industries were also in decline, the public market was destroyed by fire, and there were barely enough resources to pay the salaries of public officials.

What did they do?

Local government and stakeholders developed a clear vision and action plan based on their application for World Heritage status and conservation as a tool for development. The plan had four key objectives.

Strategic priorities

Strengthen the sense of identity and pride of the citizens in their historic city – grow their confidence and knowledge.

Embed the approach into long-term policy and management of the city – so short-term political changes do not disrupt the momentum.

Forge local and international linkages – learning from other historic cities and securing support for progressive changes from the Spanish government for the master planning process, as well as working with local universities to tap into extra resources and research capacity. These partnerships help deliver where resources are limited.

Develop Vigan as a tourism destination that enriches and conserves the people's core values and traditions, as well as sustaining their livelihoods.

What worked?

The city invested in a programme of research and education across the city. This focused on the city's history, traditions, arts, culture, and industries through brochures, e-books, films, newsletters, coffee table books, postage stamps, children's textbooks about the city, a website for local people and visitors, and support for community organisations.

Residents and property owners were given conservation guidelines (in a manual published every year) that set out the appropriate uses of ancestral houses and other built structures. Street signs in the historic quarter are now made from local clay, enhancing the local distinctiveness; properties and the public realm were restored; and administration set aside 1% of budget for arts, culture and tourism investment.

There was a focus on community needs as a priority – this included measures to provide clean water to villages, solid waste systems, focus on health and sanitation, and developing roads to villages so that they could be accessible for tourism and other economic activities. Conservation craftspeople were trained and accredited, traditional industries, such as jar-making and weaving, were also incorporated into the school curriculum.

A cultural mapping analysis study was carried out with the University of Santo Thomas to guide conservation efforts, and also to identify gaps in the offer for tourists. This led to identification of need for new products and experiences such as a river cruise, children's museum, conservation complex (housing a training centre, conservation laboratory, research library, conservation materials depot, product development centre, and accommodation), and rural theme park to showcase Ilocano culture. The mappings also highlighted the need to find better ways to enable visitors to experience and understand the city's heritage. **The city created six festivals to enhance the visitor experience** and benefit local people, and the local government created an environment in which the private sector could thrive and develop a range of other attractions and services.

What was tough?

Measures to protect the historic quarter were not always popular with the property owners of residents – passing of local conservation laws that defined the boundaries of the protected historic areas, specifying the core and buffer zones. A Conservation Council was created to streamline building permits in the historic district – restrictions of how people manage/use properties were initially unpopular.

How did they get buy-in?

It was key to focus on the things people needed most as priorities– better roads, clean water, waste systems, business opportunities, and better education. It was also important to marry the needs of the community (particularly of the poorest members of the community) with developing the infrastructure to enable tourism development.

What are the results?

Measures to protect the historic quarter were not always popular with the property owners of residents – passing of local conservation laws that defined the boundaries of the protected historic areas, specifying the core and buffer zones. A Conservation Council was created to streamline building permits in the historic district – restrictions of how people manage/use properties were initially unpopular.

Vigan is now a bustling city with a growing economy. Visitor numbers have climbed from 76,000 in 2009 to 335,000 in 2012.

The poverty rate has fallen from 45.5% in 1995 to 9% in 2013.

The city finances have recovered and now stand at 292 million Pesos (up from 27 million in 1995).

Health and education rates have improved markedly.

The heritage-led regeneration strategy has enabled the city to invest in a range of other facilities for the people of the city, including two new public high schools and one elementary school; a new public market; a slaughterhouse; a new beach resort; internet access for many people across the city; recycling facilities for solid waste, paper and plastic; a TV network for the city; training programmes for more than 5,000 artisans; and a poverty relief programme.

Conservation challenges remain as a changing and economically thriving city creates tensions about the uses of old properties and spaces – some properties remain in a state of disrepair and increases in traffic creates problems.

Vigan campaigned for and was reinstated as a city in 2001.

It was also recognized by UNESCO for Best Practice in World Heritage site management in 2012.

What lessons can others take from this?

Vigan has been transformed through a process of understanding its heritage tourism potential, developing an action plan, and by the delivery of that action plan through good governance that has delivered on people's everyday needs and aspirations, while also taking seriously the need for robust conservation of the historic fabric.



To learn more, visit vigancity.gov.ph or whc.unesco.org/en/news/948 for details on their Best Practice recognition.

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To read the complete toolkit visit
whc.unesco.org/en/tourismtoolkit



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