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# UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Online Toolkit

## Guide 2 Developing a strategy for progressive change



# 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

Guide 1  
Understanding



Guide 2  
Strategy



Guide 3  
Governance



Guide 4  
Engagement

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

Guide 5  
Communication



Guide 6  
Infrastructure



Guide 7  
Value



Guide 8  
Behaviour



Guide 9  
Investment



Guide 10  
Monitoring

## 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 2: Developing a strategy for progressive change

This guide will tell you how to develop a strategy for your destination that complements both the sensitive nature of a heritage site, as well as the task of sustainable and profitable tourism.

### Why this matters

Destinations are more than just the sum of their parts, and **changing the strategy of a destination requires the active support and commitment** from a range of stakeholders. There must be an appreciation and anticipation of the domino effect, as certain changes may have unforeseen consequences. With that in mind, there must also be contingency measures in place, as well as a degree of flexibility in the plan chosen.

To secure stakeholder 'buy-in' and understanding, **it is crucial that there is a destination management strategy** for making tourism more sustainable. This realisation is critical to both the success of the plan and the on-going viability of the World Heritage site, itself.

“Strategies may range from hundreds of pages created by specialist teams at a significant cost, to relatively simple documents that can be created for little or no cost. Both options can work depending on your situation and your resources. **If you have no existing strategy, even developing a simple one is a step forward and worth doing.** The more concise it is, the more likely people are to read it!”

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### Identify key stakeholders

**Start by listing the key stakeholders in the destination as a whole** – this includes the tourism sector, conservation specialists, community representatives, and other groups or individuals involved in economic, community, environmental management, and heritage protection activities. This need not be an extra expense. **All you need** is some **time and effort**, a pen, and a sheet of paper. There is no excuse for not doing this. When you have made your list, you can start a **simple mapping analysis** of stakeholders' roles, responsibilities, and resources.

Prioritise the list in order to target your resources. While inclusiveness, respect, and listening are the key words in these guides, prioritising your resources is also crucial for strategy development. Some stakeholders will warrant some detailed face-to-face time, others however, can be handled as part of a wider collective forum or consultation.

Listen to different issues, challenges, and aspirations  
Sustainable tourism requires **both community and business buy-in and support**, so one of the first steps is to **exchange ideas** with the full range of stakeholders in the community, as well as the economic and conservation sectors. In some cases, this will require one-on-one in-depth interviews, while in others it may be achieved through an existing forum or online consultation.

**The purpose of this is to identify** the aspirations, concerns, opportunities, challenges, roles, and resources of different stakeholders. **This is a crucial step in the process** – and cannot be undertaken retrospectively. It will require an investment of some time. However, it does not need to be expensive, and the information you gather will certainly be valuable. **Without listening there will be no trust and no buy-in.** Constructive ideas will emerge from this process – it is not just a feel good exercise.

### 3. Identify key strategic issues and test them with stakeholders

#### Develop a simple SWOT analysis

What are the key stakeholder concerns?

The key risks or threats?

What are the key aspirations for individual businesses/ stakeholders/the destination as a whole?

What are the most threatening risks?

What are the opportunities for doing things better?

Capture these in a short paper for discussion with stakeholders. The key to this exercise is to identify those key issues that stakeholders will need to focus their efforts, as well as identify other outcomes that might also be achieved. The best strategies are not only about delivering what is good for conservation, but also what is good for communities and businesses.

Organise a public meeting or Destination Management Planning (DMP) forum to explain the emerging strategic focus. In a best case scenario, many people will attend and offer constructive input. Yet, even if attendance is modest and there is some negative feedback, it is still a crucial step in widening understanding, allowing opportunities for feedback, as well as transparency and accountability.

Use the DMP Forum to agree on basic priorities for sustainable tourism in the destination. Different cultures and societies have different ways of reaching a consensus – so there is no one-size-fits-all method for this. The basic reality is that the destination needs management, it has finite resources, and it should focus on some, rather than all, the potential activities at once.

### 4. Get support to develop a strategy for the destination

At the public meetings and discussions with key stakeholders, **ask for a mandate** supporting strategy development that addresses key issues. **Stakeholders must commit** to the process of developing a strategy. If not, it is possible they will ignore the destination strategy, or dispute its validity later in the process.

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### 5. Develop a sustainable, multi-year tourism strategy

**Create a simple strategy** from what you now know. The DMP forum should have resulted in some degree of consensus on the key issues – **this needs to be captured and distributed** to ensure that it is widely recognised and respected. It will also allow other stakeholders who did not attend the forum to understand the process that has been initiated.

Strategies may range from hundreds of pages created by specialist teams at a significant cost, to relatively simple documents that can be created for little or no cost. Both options can work depending on your situation and your resources. If you have no existing strategy, **even developing a simple one is a step forward and worth doing**. The more concise a document is, the more likely people are to read it!

**Your strategy should provide the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘why’, and ‘how’** to bring about the changes desired. It should be built around the core issues identified from both your research on impacts and opportunities (Guide One) and from your stakeholder consultation. **The strategy should have a simple vision** that reflects the aspirations of the stakeholders. This should, ideally, be partly about protecting the things that matter in your destination, as well as making it better for people to visit, more effectively delivering outcomes desired by the host community and businesses.

Look to **connect stakeholder aspirations and site preservation** by creating business or community opportunities – stress the positive.

#### The strategy should identify:

The top 3-5 issues affecting the site

The opportunities for doing things better

Explain the current capacity and potential resources for solutions

Set out the steps required for delivering those future solutions.

**A good strategy** is quite direct in setting out the issues, risks, challenges, objectives, roles, and responsibilities. It should consider environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health and safety, aesthetic, and tourism issues.

**Everyone** in the destination with a role to play **should be able to understand** what is expected of them when they read it, and how they might benefit from supporting it. You might find it helpful to **summarise** the strategy in **ten simple steps**.

The strategy development should also include some **careful thinking about future scenarios** and look at the costs and benefits of pursuing different objectives – for instance, whether an objective is likely to have economic, ecological, or cultural impacts that are undesirable, or whether the infrastructure required for an objective is genuinely feasible and sustainable.

In the case of a crisis or emergency, as a destination you must **develop crisis and emergency management plans** for the protection of heritage, local people, individuals in the tourism sector, and visitors. This can mitigate risk if an emergency situation should arise, such as natural disasters, outbreak of social unrest, or other eventualities that might result in large scale damage to the World Heritage site or destination as a whole.

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## 6. Publish and champion the strategy

You need to **sell the strategy** and the benefits of supporting it. You need to be able to **convince different stakeholders** that championing this strategy, and playing an active role in its implementation, will result in desirable outcomes and benefits both for the destination as a whole, and the businesses and communities within it. If the strategy is an effective marriage of socio-economic and conservation perspectives, then it should offer people hope for the future and a road map as to how their aspirations can be realised.

You should also seek to **embed the strategy in governing policy**. Even if all stakeholders cannot agree, they will need to see the basis on which strategic decisions have been made, have the ability to offer their input, and also understand that some preservation issues at a World Heritage site are effectively non-negotiable. It should also be clear that the process is transparent and accountable.

**Put your name on it** – great strategies belong to someone. In some of the best cases, the mayor of a destination has published their ownership of a strategy and made it quite clear that it is their job to make it a reality. This really does matter. By taking ownership, **people see commitment**, and ideally, a commitment leading to success.

**Presentation matters** (a lot). There are no rules on presentation, but it must **communicate the key messages and inspire action**. We would encourage you to innovate in terms of finding a way to present your strategy. For example, it does not have to be a dull word document. It might just as easily be a short film, presentation, speech, cartoon, poster for noticeboards, or some other form of communication. Too many strategies fail due to lack of involvement and poor communication, so **think carefully** about presenting your strategy in a way that will be noticed, understood, and respected by the target audiences. After all, the more accessible your campaign, the greater the chance of widening its ownership.

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## 7. Identify the agency that will take responsibility for different elements of the strategy

Well-managed World Heritage sites and great tourism destinations are defined by strong leadership, effective partner collaboration, and good governance. Arguably the **single biggest determinant** of effective sustainable tourism is **whether it has a robust and accountable management structure**, with the capacity to bring about progressive changes when needed.

We would not presume to offer a one-size-fits-all mode for managing a destination sustainably. World Heritage sites are simply too diverse in terms of their social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. **The key is having an organisation or partnership** with the capacity, knowledge, skills, and commitment to bring about positive changes to the destination. Some destinations will already have fit-for-purpose management organisations or partnership structures; others will need to create them. Either way, there will be a **need for leadership** and making tough decisions – great management of destinations frequently involves saying ‘no’ more often than saying ‘yes’. It is an essential ingredient of strategic planning that a governance mechanism or partnership is established that can muster the support, resources, and ultimately, the power to deliver any strategy.

## 8. Encourage debate and feedback

**Publish the strategy** to the widest possible audience of stakeholders. It may be easier to develop a strategy behind closed doors with a handful of experts, but however tempting this approach may be, it is a recipe for ineffectiveness. You need to **be courageous and involve** business, community, and tourism stakeholders in the strategy process at the earliest opportunity. They have valuable perspectives and will be critical to the delivery of any future changes. If you do not involve people at the beginning, they will not believe you later when you tell them you want an inclusive and open process for their benefit.

Even when some stakeholders dissent, **look for ways to secure their support.** Not everyone will agree with the sustainable tourism strategy in the beginning. This is quite normal. Many successful destinations began the process with some dissenters, but carefully cultivated their interest and support as the plan developed. **Keep communicating with them**, particularly about how their interests are being addressed, their part in shaping measures, and ultimately how the measures are benefiting them. People are often suspicious of change – the key is good on-going communication, listening, and respect of others’ views.

## 9. Reassess the strategy periodically

A strategy should be regarded as a **working document that can be returned to periodically** to reflect changes in the destination, its tourism economy, conservation status, and the needs of its community. It is crucial that the strategy is subjected to on-going scrutiny concerning its effectiveness, as well as assessment of whether partners are prioritising time, money, and people to the best effect for achieving the strategy objectives. **At least once a year** stakeholders should compare progress with the objectives of the strategy and feed in new evidence on the issues.

**Future proofing is critical.** Tourism has to evolve as the community develops to ensure it continues to offer high quality opportunities. Being aware of this and having flexibility in strategy and governance is extremely important to tourism development.

There is no end to a strategy. **It is always a work in progress**, constantly evolving to reflect the challenges faced by the destination.

## Guide 2 Case study

### Angkor and The Tourism Development Strategic Plan 2012–2020

#### Baseline situation

This case study on Angkor represents some of the key threats and concerns World Heritage sites across the world may also have to deal with and manage. When Angkor was first inscribed in 1992, it was immediately placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to threat from conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam. It was only removed from this List in 2004, and, although domestic conflict was no longer a threat to the site, a number of new issues endangering the site had become apparent.

Angkor is an extensive site, which in recent years, has been visited by over three million international and domestic tourists per year. **The impact of so many visitors is one of the key threats** Angkor has been attempting to manage since its inscription. However, numbers have only continued to steadily increase. Furthermore, Angkor is also an inhabited landscape, a fact that has presented difficulties for those parties wishing to present an environment that fits a certain view of the World Heritage site and how it should look, rather than the reality of a contemporary and lived-in setting.

Another difficulty comes from the location of Angkor being in Siem Reap, one of the poorest provinces in Cambodia. This creates a set of circumstances that makes local residents more inclined to place emphasis and importance on the basic and immediate economical potential of Angkor rather than any longer term value and developmental potential it holds for the region. The comparative wealth of those who visit Angkor is also a draw for those living in other regions of Cambodia; **it has been estimated that almost half** of those working in the accommodation sector **are not Siem Reap residents** but seasonal workers who travel there to cash in on tourism.

#### What did they do?

**'Managing heritage at Angkor requires managing tourism'** (Tourism Management Plan 2012-2020)

The involved parties recognised that unless management dramatically changed to meet the contemporary needs of Angkor and its population, the site would be damaged beyond recovery. It has also been recognised that tourism represents both an economic necessity and the biggest threat to the longevity of Angkor, so it was decided a comprehensive tourism strategy must be developed in order to minimise threat and improve the long-term viability of Angkor as both a destination and a place for people to live. In response to this, the 'Angkor World Heritage Area Tourism Management Plan, 2012–2020' (TMP) under the Angkor Heritage Management Framework (HMF) project was developed.

#### Strategic priorities

Dealing with the rapidly increasing numbers of tourists who visit Angkor.

Reducing negative impacts of tourism (previously understood primarily in terms of conservation at the expense of all else).

Improving tourist understanding of the local uses of Angkor, both as an inhabited area and as a place of continued religious significance.

Creating a more cohesive tourism industry that adheres to particular practice and standards.

Providing better opportunities and financial return for local residents.

For full details of the Angkor Wat TMP, click [here](#).

## What worked?

The final draft of **the TMP is a long and detailed document comprised of six broader aims** or 'initiatives' addressing the four strategic priorities— promoting positive visitor experiences, reducing site impacts, partnering with industry, providing benefits for local people, improving governance, and engaging with stakeholders.

**Initiative-specific strategies are defined to fulfil these aims**, and each strategy is composed of individual steps (**ranging from high to low priority**) that are planned to take place in the approaching months and years.

Although the broader strategies and steps involved are in respect to different final goals, **there are a number of common themes that the strategies share** – communication, collaboration, delegation, limitation, examination, diversification, and conservation – and **these themes can provide a template** for other World Heritage site managers to consider in relation to their own sites, rather than the specific strategies and steps which have been defined with Angkor in mind.

## What was tough?

The issues faced by Angkor have received much attention and criticism for perceived failures in management. The scale and complexity of Angkor means there is no one easy solution, and a number of measures have been undertaken in the past to deal with conservation and local residents. However, **many of these efforts have failed due to a lack of communication** between the different bodies responsible for Angkor; a lack of understanding on behalf of residents regarding the policies of World Heritage; an unwillingness to implement any system that might reduce the number of tourists who represent the region's primary source of income; and the desire to conserve above all else. **Consequently, the strategic priorities for Angkor mentioned above have remained the same for some time.**

## How did they get buy-in?

Various stakeholders involved, including the Royal Government of Cambodia, the ICC, and the wider conservation community **recognized and communicated the necessity for change and management of the growing risks associated with tourism and development at Angkor Wat and Siem Reap as a destination.** A 'Tourism Industry Stakeholder Workshop' and a 'Community, Monks and NGO Workshop' were held in Siem Reap in March 2012. Together, all of the stakeholders involved provided feedback, drafts, and changes prior to the adoption of the final draft of the Tourism Management Plan (TMP) aiming to make the industry more sustainable and beneficial to the conservation of the World Heritage site, the local community, and tourism businesses within the destination.

## What lessons can others take from this?

When developing a tourism strategy for a World Heritage site, **consider what the site has to offer even beyond its World Heritage status.** The current World Heritage List citation for Angkor does not include natural values, nor does it recognise Angkor's role as a spiritual lived-in landscape, but these may be of equal interest to tourists as the magnificent architecture and age of the site.

As with many other sites discussed in this Toolkit **the local community must be a key consideration, and this includes local residents, tour operators, business owners, and anyone else** who may be affected by the presence of the WHS and tourism the site draws. Setting up lines of communication should always be one of the very first things site managers work at prior to and during the conception and implementation of a Tourism Strategy.



## Guide 2 Case study

### Ichkeul National Park (Tunisia)

#### Baseline situation

Ichkeul National Park is characterised by a very specific hydrological functioning system, based on seasonal alternation of water levels and salinity. The lake and surrounding marshes constitute a stopover for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds, such as ducks, geese, storks, and pink flamingos that winter at Ichkeul.

**It was placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 1996 due to dams upstream** that had cut off nearly all the fresh water flow to the lake and interfered with the natural flora, **resulting in a severe decrease** in the number of birds stopping in the Park.

#### What did they do?

**In order to involve stakeholders at all levels**, the Ichkeul National Park Management Committee was formed with representatives from local communities, the Ichkeul Agricultural Development Group, government authorities, and various other parties.

**Maintaining tourism was deemed fundamental** – a UNESCO-funded marketing campaign promoted the Park as a tourist destination, and a new visitor centre was built. **Local schemes trained Park guides** and raised awareness of the sensitive nature of Ichkeul National Park, and **protection measures were implemented** around the Park itself, restricting human access while working towards restoring the equilibrium of the wetlands.

#### Strategic priorities

Educating local population and tourists about the sensitive nature of the wetland ecosystem.

Involving local communities in the management of the World Heritage site.

Eliminating or minimising other practices and conditions that negatively affect the site, including hunting, grazing, and air pollution.

Restoring the natural equilibrium of the wetlands, specifically the necessary water levels, salinity, and flora.

Attracting tourists, and implementing a sustainably strategy that does not negatively affect the eco-system of the Park.

#### What worked?

After receiving funding from UNESCO's emergency assistance fund, **the Park initiated a marketing campaign and established basic guide-training and credit schemes**. This increased the involvement of local businesses and communities in tourism activities, expanded local employment, and enables a greater distribution of the economic benefits from the tourism industry.

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**The 'tourist offer' was expanded to include nature trails**, guided tours, bird-watching, traditional hammams (hot baths), excursions to the douars (tented camps) and local villages, amongst others. **Maintaining particular routes has kept visitation pressures low** and resulted in raising awareness about conserving the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the site and the importance of using the wetlands in a sustainable manner.

Adaptation measures have been developed and **water supply planning now accounts for the consumption of fresh water** by the lake and marsh. Freshwater inflow from the dams upstream and exchanges of salted water with the sea downstream is regulated, and a tailored scientific monitoring programme has also been implemented

#### What was tough?

**Funding had to be established before any of the positive changes could be initiated**. Furthermore, the active promotion of the National Park as a tourism destination has come about through the cooperation between the Park authorities and tour operators, travel agents, and the Tunisian National Tourist Organisation – these relationships had to be developed.

## How did they get buy-in?

The value of the site as a tourist destination was **recognised**, along with the realization that the negative effect of the dam affected the value of the Park and the local community. **Regaining and increasing the attention of tourists was recognised as necessary** for the future of the site, and the increase in tourism has generated income which, in addition to contributing to the maintenance of the Park's infrastructure, feeds into the local economy.

## What are the results?

Ichkeul National Park was taken off the Heritage in **Danger List in 2006**, after being on the List for over ten years. **Tourist numbers have doubled** (approx. 50,000 per annum), but **the impact of increased visitation is kept low** as general access to the marshes and the lake is restricted to special circuits with observation towers and look-out points. Approved routes are well-marked, and trained local guides for tourists ensure the protection of the marshes from negative tourism pressures.

**Training schemes mean that local residents have the opportunity to enter the tourism sector** more easily, making tourism more sustainable in the long term as local knowledge, awareness and involvement has increased. The increase in tourism has generated income, which, in addition to contributing to the maintenance of the Park's infrastructure – its visitor centre for example – and to conservation management, feeds into the local economy via the wages of a local workforce.

## What lessons can others take from this?

The OUV of many World Heritage sites, particularly natural sites, is derived from their unique habitat and the wildlife it attracts. However, these **conditions are fragile and require a specific balance** of conditions that depend on minimal human impact. This renders their attractiveness as tourist destinations problematic, and in order to maintain the conditions that are valued, the inevitable impact of any human visitation must be kept to the minimum.

The Ichkeul National Park was on the Danger List for ten years before being removed in 2006. **Positive change does not happen over night!** But Ichkeul National Park shows that with hard work, a clear vision, and the inclusion of the local community, positive change can be implemented with even the most delicate of sites visited sustainably by tens of thousands of tourists.

**“Regaining and increasing the attention of tourists was recognised as necessary for the future of the site, and the increase in tourism has generated income which, in addition to contributing to the maintenance of the Park's infrastructure, feeds into the local economy.”**



For more details regarding collaboration and implementation of Ichkeul's strategy, see the decision document from the 27th World Heritage Committee session [here](#) (p11).

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To read the complete toolkit visit  
[whc.unesco.org/en/tourismtoolkit](http://whc.unesco.org/en/tourismtoolkit)



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