



Tourism and visitation to protected areas amid COVID-19

Guidance for protected area
authorities and managers

*International
Partnerships*



1. Purpose of this guidance

Tourism is an essential contributor to [protected area](#) revenues, conservation finances, and to local livelihoods.¹ As people emerge from the psychological and physical effects of lockdowns,² market intelligence indicates that they are likely to seek out recreation and relaxation in outdoor spaces – particularly in their home countries.³ The distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and emergence of Travel Passports provide hope that protected area visits and travel will resume.

Managers of protected areas that usually have visitors are under pressure to provide facilities safely, but there are challenges to doing so given rapidly changing conditions and new health and safety requirements. The purpose of this document is to provide pragmatic guidance to protected area managers and authorities on operating tourism safely amid the COVID-19 crisis. Suggestions are provided, accompanied by supplementary links to sources and further information. While the guidance provides an overview, it should be noted that it is not exhaustive, and each protected area will have different conditions and requirements that could need further adaptation as the situation evolves.

COVID-19 background

COVID-19 is an infectious disease created by a newly discovered coronavirus, for which no specific vaccines were available until the end of 2020. It is thought that the virus spreads from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks – and can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.⁴ The current advice from the World Health Organisation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the best ways to protect against infection include: washing hands or using alcohol-based hand sanitiser frequently; covering your mouth and noses with a mask around others; not touching faces; covering coughs and sneezes; avoiding close contact; cleaning and disinfecting touched surfaces.⁵

- [WHO Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Dashboard](#) – World Health Organization (WHO)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) situation reports](#) – WHO
- [COVID-19 vaccines](#) - WHO
- [Avoid the three C's](#) - WHO
- [Coronavirus pandemic \(COVID-19\)](#) - Our World In Data
- [Get the facts about coronavirus](#) –Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (USA)
- [How to protect yourself and others](#) – CDC
- [How COVID-19 spreads](#) – CDC

Quote

“Moving past the immediate pandemic outbreak, it will be important to recognise and promote the role of protected and conserved areas in sustaining human physical and psychological health, especially after a long period of lockdown or enforced isolation. Protected and conserved areas that allow visitation should aim to reopen where disease risks permit, using appropriate social or physical distancing rules.”

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas.

(i) Hockings, M., N. Dudley, W. Elliott, M. Napolitano Ferreira, K. MacKinnon, et al. (2020). [Editorial essay: COVID-19 and protected and conserved areas](#), Parks, 26.1, 7-24.

(¹) Leung Y-F., A. Spenceley, G. Hvenegaard and R. Buckley (2018). [Tourism and visitor management in protected areas: Guidelines for sustainability](#), Best Practice Protected Area Guideline Series No. 27, IUCN, Geneva.

(²) McCarthy N. (2020). [Covid-19's widespread impact on mental health](#), Statista; Pers. Com. Peter Jacobs, WCPA, August 2020.

(³) Tripadvisor (2020). [Beyond COVID-19: The road to recovery for the travel industry](#); Bremner, C. (2020) [Travel 2024: Sustainability and digital transformation as recovery drivers](#), Euromonitor International.

(⁴) CDC (2020). [How COVID-19 spreads](#). Accessed on 27 July 2020.

(⁵) World Health Organisation (2020b). [Coronavirus](#). Accessed on 21 April 2020; and CDC (2020) [How to protect yourself & others](#). Accessed on 27 July 2020.

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*Life before social distancing:
 tourists on a boat trip in Madagascar
 prior to the pandemic*

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*Much of the tourism in protected areas
 relates to wildlife viewing. Watching
 elephants at Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas
 complex, Central African Republic
 (© Luis Arranz)*

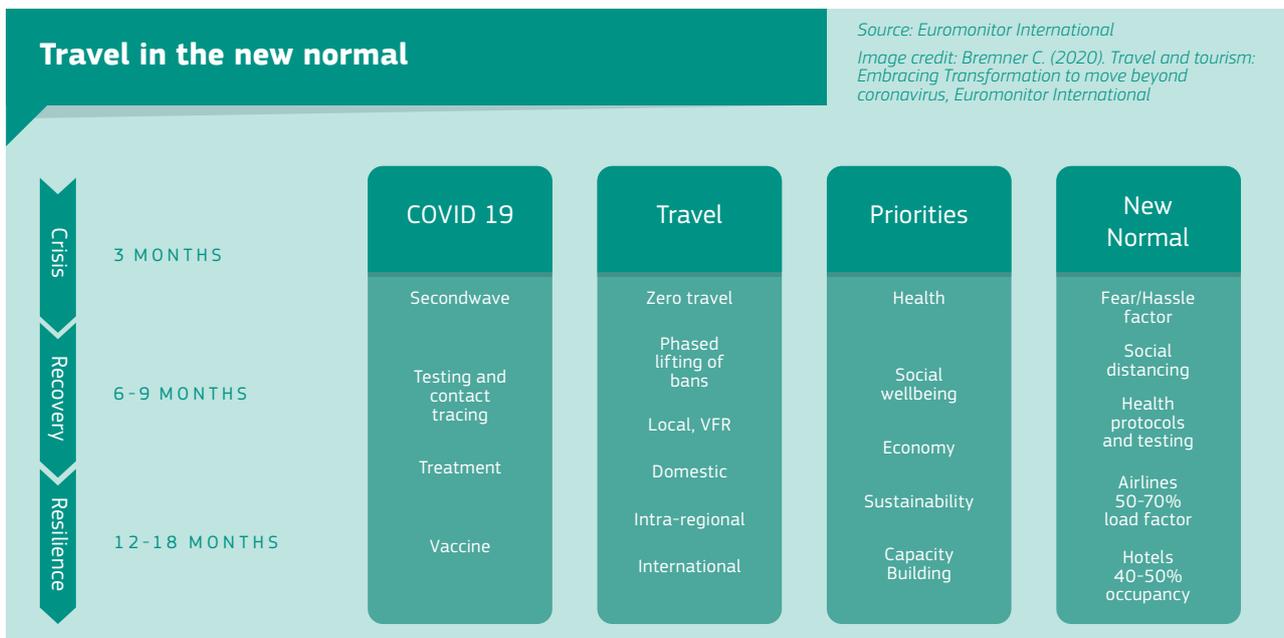


2. COVID-19 and tourism

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global tourism: The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic has had a global impact on the tourism sector. Between January and May 2020, 100 % of global destinations imposed travel restrictions, 45 % had totally or partially closed their borders to tourists,⁶ and by September 50 % had cautiously eased travel restrictions.⁷ The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates a global loss of 197 million jobs in 2020 and USD 5.5 trillion in revenue⁸ due to the pandemic. There are grave concerns that with the tourism sector suspended, millions of jobs could be lost, and progress made in equality and sustainable economic growth could be rolled back.⁹ Amid the pause there are calls from the United Nations and many experts for inclusive, regenerative and sustainable practices to be mainstreamed as tourism recovers.¹⁰

Economic impact reports of the virus on the tourism sector

- [COVID-19 and tourism: Assessing the economic consequences](#) – UNCTAD
- [COVID-19 - a global insight on travel and tourism impacts, UNWTO and Data Partners](#) – UNWTO
- [Impact assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak on international tourism](#) – UNWTO
- [The domino effect of COVID-19](#) – WTTC
- [Travel Demand Recovery Dashboard](#) – WTTC
- [UNWTO Tourism Recovery tracker](#) – UNWTO



⁽⁶⁾ UN World Tourism Organization (2020). [100% of global destinations now have COVID-19 travel restrictions](#), UNWTO reports.
⁽⁷⁾ UNWTO (2020). [More than 50% of global destinations are easing travel restrictions – but caution remains](#), Accessed 2 October 2020.
⁽⁸⁾ WTTC (2020). [More than 197m travel and tourism jobs will be lost due to prolonged travel restrictions, according to new research from WTTC](#), Accessed 10 October 2020.
⁽⁹⁾ UN World Tourism Organization (2020c). [COVID-19 response: 96% of global destinations impose travel restrictions](#), UNWTO reports, Accessed on 21 April 2020.
⁽¹⁰⁾ e.g. see Hockings M. et al. (2020). Op. cit. Campaign for Nature (2020). [A key sector forgotten in the stimulus debate: The nature-based economy](#); Forrester (2020). [Rethinking sustainability in the middle of a pandemic](#); UNESCO (2020). [Experts call for inclusive and regenerative tourism to build back stronger post-COVID-19](#); UN News (2020). [Devastated by pandemic, tourism sector must be rebuilt in a safe, equitable and climate friendly way – UN chief](#).

Implications for protected areas: There have been numerous news articles in recent months regarding the impacts of a reduction in visits to protected areas¹¹. This includes impacts on revenues for conservation, businesses that operate tourism and the livelihoods of people that supply labour, goods and services to tourists and tourism businesses, and implications for wildlife crime (including the financial capacity to sustain anti-poaching efforts without tourism revenues).

Articles on the implications of COVID-19 for protected area tourism, conservation and communities

- [Editorial essay: COVID-19 and protected and conserved areas – PARKS](#)
- [COVID-19 and protected area tourism: A spotlight on impacts and options in Africa - European Union](#)
- [The Future of Nature-Based Tourism: Impacts of COVID-19 and paths to sustainability - Luc Hoffmann Institute](#)
- [Tourism in protected areas amid the COVID-19 pandemic - PARKS](#)
- [The collapse of tourism and its impact on wildlife tourism destinations – Journal of Tourism Futures](#)
- [Protecting 30% of the planet for nature: costs, benefits and economic implications – Campaign for Nature](#)
- [Amidst COVID-19 situation, community conservation must continue – Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association](#)
- [Conservation in crisis: ecotourism collapse threatens communities and wildlife – The Guardian](#)
- [Halt in ecotourism threatens conservation efforts worldwide – Washington Post](#)
- [Coronavirus is crushing tourism - and cutting off a lifeline for wildlife – The Washington Post](#)
- [The coronavirus pandemic has halted tourism, and animals are benefiting from it – The Washington Post](#)
- [Poachers kill more rhinos as coronavirus halts tourism in Africa – New York Times](#)
- [Is wildlife tourism essential? – Conde Nast Traveller](#)

Much of the tourism in protected areas relates to wildlife viewing. Prior to the pandemic in 2018, over a third of all direct tourism GDP across Africa could be attributed to wildlife, and 21.8 million jobs were supported by wildlife tourism globally.¹² Protected areas were receiving roughly 8 billion visits per year,¹³ and generating approximately USD 600 billion per year in direct in-country expenditure and USD 250 billion per year in consumer surplus.¹⁴ For many protected and conserved areas, negative impacts on management capacity, budgets and effectiveness are significant, as are impacts on the livelihoods of communities living in and around these areas.¹⁵

Impact of COVID-19 on protected area tourism in Africa

COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect on tourism in protected areas globally. Research undertaken for the EU between April and June 2020 demonstrated the dramatic effect of the pandemic on tourism economies around protected areas.¹⁶ Responses from 736 operators offering accommodation (31 %), tour operator services (26 %), activities and experiences (21 %), restaurant/bar services (8 %), and hunting (6 %), working in 41 African countries, revealed the following:

- **Impacts on bookings and business:** There was a steep decline in operators' clients in March 2020 compared to the same time last year (63 % less), coupled with a substantial drop in future booking requests (72 % lower). The majority of operators' clients cancelled between March and June 2020 (83 % on average).
- **Local livelihoods:** The majority of employees are recruited locally (59 %), but due to the crisis most are on reduced wages (65 %). Operators predict that if the crisis continues over 17 000 local employees would be adversely impacted. Local procurement of products, hospitality services, and payments to community initiatives is predicted to be USD 81 million lower than the previous financial year (a 47 % decline).
- **Environmental impacts:** Environmental crime is one of the immediate concerns of most operators (80 %) and a majority predict that levels will increase due to the pandemic (87 %). Compounding this is a likely reduction of operator expenditure on local environmental services by USD 26 million due to lower tourism turnover.

⁽¹¹⁾ See Spenceley A. (2020). [COVID-19 and sustainable tourism: Information resources and links](#)

⁽¹²⁾ WTTC (2019). [Economic impact of global wildlife tourism](#)

⁽¹³⁾ The authors of this report compiled counts of visits to terrestrial Protected Areas (PAs), drawn from the peer-reviewed and grey literature, online datasets and personal contacts. Where possible they scored each visitor-day (i.e. when a person spends at least a portion of a day at a site) as a visit although in an unknown proportion of PAs longer and multiple-entry stays are counted as single visits.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Balmford A. et al. (2015). [Walk on the wild side: estimating the global magnitude of visits to protected areas](#), PLoS Biol 13(2): e1002074.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Hockings M. et al. (2020). Op. cit.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Spenceley A. (2021). COVID-19 and protected area tourism: A spotlight on impacts and options in Africa, Report to the European Union.

Quotes from survey participantsⁱⁱ

Democratic Republic of Congo:

“Virunga National Park closed the park due to [the] possible effect that COVID-19 would have on the mountain gorillas, being an endangered species, we had to put their welfare as a priority above everything, so therefore we have had 100 % cancellations and have taken no bookings. The financial effect of COVID-19 has been devastating on cash flow for the park”.

Kenya:

“[The] COVID-19 pandemic has led to closure of hotels and restaurants within the Community Conservancies. All 39 Community Conservancies under the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) umbrella have closed all the tourism facilities. Amidst the stigma from COVID-19 most of the operations within these conservancies have been scaled down to core operations and wildlife protection.”

Zimbabwe:

“Our team on property are 100 % Zimbabwean, and they rely on the local hospitality industry to support their families and communities. Unfortunately, companies in Zimbabwe will not receive any tax-relief during this crisis, and anyone who loses their job will have no support from the state. Therefore, whole families and communities will be impacted by any redundancies.”

(ii) Spenceley A. (2021). *COVID-19 and protected area tourism: A spotlight on impacts and options in Africa*. Report to the European Union.

The pandemic has had a serious impact on local livelihoods linked to protected area tourism. Below, tourists are guided by canoe in the Okavanga Delta, Botswana



Like many protected areas, Dzanga-Sangha protected areas complex in the Central African Republic closed to tourists during the pandemic. Here, a ranger prepares a weekly food and medicine package for the Ba'Aka indigenous peoples' community, who isolated in forest camps for 5 months. (Luis Arranz)

3. Visiting conditions

Starting conditions: Some protected areas closed due to COVID-19 and have no visitors, while others remained open. Some have re-opened for visitors with protocols in place to reduce transmission risks to staff and visitors. Furthermore, while some protected areas are able to control access (e.g. in Africa and Asia), many do not have this option (e.g. in Europe). The way in which this paper is used by protected area authorities will depend on these starting conditions.

Examples of protected area closures and re-openings

Closures: [Colombia](#), [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), [Indonesia](#), [Nepal](#), [Thailand](#)

Re-openings: [Brazil](#), [Ecuador](#), [Egypt](#), [Korea](#), [Rwanda](#), [South Africa](#)

Some protected areas that were initially closed made policy decisions to re-open for specific types of visitor and/or activity:

- In **Korea**, public facilities such as campsites, shelters and visitor centres that were closed in February 2020 gradually re-opened as COVID-19 cases decreased. Face-to-face visitor programmes have been banned, but alternative services are provided through YouTube and social media.
- In **Hong Kong's** country parks, public gathering areas were closed (e.g. visitor centres, barbecue sites, camping sites) but hiking trails remained open.
- In **South Africa**, parks were opened first for day visits, and then intra-provincial overnight visits, followed by inter-provincial leisure travel, then regional travel, and finally international travel.

[Parks and outdoor spaces: How did the number of visitors change since the beginning of the pandemic?](#) Our World in Data

Intergovernmental agency and government guidance:

International agencies and national governments are rapidly producing policy responses for their countries on travel and tourism in light of COVID-19. Adhering to the regulations and guidance produced by their governments should be the first priority of protected area managers. Importantly, policy responses will vary from country to country depending on the prevalence of the disease and government's risk management protocols.

International guidance on policies and travel:

- [COVID-19 Law Lab](#) – UNDP, UNAIDS, WHO, O'Neill Institute, Georgetown University
- [Travel Advice](#) – World Health Organization (WHO)
- [Foreign travel advice](#) – UK Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO)
- [Policy responses to COVID-19](#) - Policy tracker – International Monetary Fund
- [Interactive coronavirus \(COVID-19 Travel Regulations Map\)](#) – IATA
- [COVID-19-related policy shifts of travel & tourism sector](#) – WTTC
- [Monitoring World Heritage site closures](#) – UNESCO
- [COVID-19 related travel restrictions](#) – UNWTO

National & regional guidance:

- [Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) – Gov.uk
- [Guidance for administrators in parks and recreational facilities](#) – CDC
- [Tourism industry guidelines for coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) – Victoria State Government
- [What you can and can't do under the rules](#) – New South Wales Government

Authorities may produce guidance for travellers and the tourism operators relevant to all protected areas in their remit, with specific information for particular sites if it varies. Checklists and protocols should also be established to guide managers on procedures to follow, for example if a positive case is confirmed (e.g. refused entry; contact tracing; park closures).

Examples of visitor guidance issued by protected area institutions

- Australia: [COVID-19 update](#) – Parks Victoria
- Belgium: [Coronavirus / Covid-19](#) – Pairi Daiza
- Brazil: [Conheça os parques que já foram reabertos](#) – Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio)
- Canada: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) – Parks Canada
- Costa Rica: [Protocolo General para hacer uso de las Áreas Silvestres Protegidas del Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación con permiso de apertura establecidos a la fecha](#) – MINAE – SINAC
- Egypt: [Guidelines related to the emerging coronavirus \(Arabic\)](#) – Ministry of Environment



- France: [Guidelines for visiting 21 refuges in the Ecrins National Park \(French\)](#) – Fédération française des clubs alpins et de montagne
- Italy: [Anti-contagion protocol for excursions in protected national areas](#) (Italian) – Federparchi, RomaNatura, Campus Bio Medico University of Rome
- Korea: [Korea National Park Service \(KNPS\) response case: COVID-19 in the Republic of Korea](#) – Republic of Korea
- Rwanda: [Rwanda reopens](#) – Visit Rwanda
- South Africa: [COVID-19 interventions for the tourism sector](#) – KZN Wildlife; [General information for self-drive day visitors to the Kruger National Park during Alert Level 3](#) – South African National Parks
- United Kingdom: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer public spaces - urban centres and green spaces-](#) Gov.uk; [Managing Scotland's parks and greenspaces during Covid-19](#) – Greenspace Scotland; [COVID-19 & Be safe outside](#) – National Parks
- USA: [NPS Public Health Update](#) – National Parks Service; [Federal Recreation Reopening Strategy Recommendations](#) – Outdoor Recreation Roundtable; [Visiting parks and recreational facilities: Protect yourself and others from COVID-19](#) – Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); [Guidance for administrators in parks and recreational facilities](#) – CDC
- Global: [A note on re-opening: What's safe?](#) – IUCN WCPA Urban Conservation Strategies Specialist Group

Example of a checklist for protected area managers

- Coordinate with other relevant agencies on policy and information exchange.
- Assessment and feasibility of screening visitors for evidence of vaccination or recovery from COVID-19, and for possible signs of COVID-19 infection.
- Inform the public that the protected area or trail could be closed again if visitors fail to follow the rules or local infections have increased.
- Limit the total number of visitors in sensitive or heavily visited parks, or attractions within parks.
- Disperse visitors away from heavily visited parks to alternative sites.
- Limit the size of informal groups, e.g. to single households or specific numbers.
- Allow customary activities of formal groups (e.g. scouts, birders and school classes, when their leaders agree to enforce the rules).
- Require social distancing of at least 2 metres/6 feet.
- Require face coverings.
- Protect sources of drinking water or require visitors to bring their own.
- Toilets: leave open and keep clean.
- Admission, rentals and other charges: suspend or make cashless.
- Trails: limit the number of hikers, bikers, and equestrians on a trail. Close narrow trails temporarily or make them one-way.
- Beaches: limit to active land and water recreation.
- Rivers and lakes: regulate boating, swimming, etc., as required.

Quote

"I'm scared of the tourists not returning, and I'm also scared of them coming back and bringing the virus here."
 Laura Mora, cook at the La Cuchara de la Abuela, Monteverde Cloud Forest⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾

(iii) Sha R. (2020). A town in Costa Rica faces an eco-tourism crisis, National Geographic.

Risk assessment and standards: Protected areas should conduct COVID-19 and visitation risk assessments in line with their protected area management plans and existing risk management guidance. The assessment should take into account local health facilities, any concerns of local people relating to allowing visitors into the area, and implications of potentially rapid changes in the numbers and types of visitors (e.g. waste management, crowding). Also consider the ethical and legal implications of opening amid COVID-19, including obligations to a 'duty of care'. One size does not fit all, and protected area authorities – whether run by government, private sector, NGOs or communities – need to establish appropriate mitigation and contingency plans.¹⁷

Risk assessment and legal considerations

- [Crisis readiness: Are you prepared and resilient to safeguard your people & destinations?](#) – World Travel and Tourism Council & Global Rescue
- [Adventure Travel COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Planning tool](#) – ATTA
- [OARS COVID-19 general mitigation plan](#)– OARS
- [An ethics framework for COVID-19 reopening process](#) – Johns Hopkins
- [Legal duty of care](#) – Global + rescue
- [US must face some claims over Yosemite Hantavirus outbreak](#) – Courthouse News Service

Health and hygiene protocols and standards are available for the tourism sector internationally and have been adjusted in relation to COVID-19. For example the 'Safe Travels' stamp has been established by the World Travel and Tourism Council, and adopted at [country level](#) (e.g. [Grenada](#), [South Africa](#), [Sri Lanka](#)) or at sub-regions within countries, while some nations are developing their own standards (e.g. [Thailand](#)). These standards can be considered in conjunction with guidance for 'Healthy parks healthy people' that emphasise natural areas as spaces for mental and physical health benefits.

Health and hygiene standards

'Safe travels': Global protocols & stamp for the new normal - WTTC

- [Hospitality - Global Protocols for the new normal](#)
- [Tour operators - Global protocols for the new normal](#)
- [Attractions – Global protocols for the new normal](#)
- [Destinations and associations using the Safe Travels Stamp](#)

Healthy parks healthy people:

- [Healthy parks healthy people Europe](#) – EuroPark Federation
- [Healthy parks healthy people](#) – Parks Victoria

- [Healthy parks healthy people SA](#) – South Australia
- [Healthy parks healthy people](#) – National Parks Service
- [Healthy parks healthy people](#) – Parks Ontario

Planning and distribution of visitors: 'Honey-pot' areas that are popular and crowded with visitors – where social distancing is difficult – have a higher risk of transmitting the virus than those that have fewer visitors, are more open and well-spaced. Protected area management plans may already include details for different 'zones' for tourism. Amid COVID-19 these may need to be revisited, particularly if there are 'high intensity use zones' that need to be managed differently. Managers can help to avoid crowding at particular locations or times, for example by limiting numbers or group sizes, issuing permits for particular places or times of visit, using one-way systems, or mobile phone apps to help people understand which sites are busy. These plans should be adaptive and responsive to visitor conditions to maximise safety and manage impacts (e.g. waste management). However, it is important to note that visitors may not respect rules or zones, and they may behave differently than in the past.¹⁸ Market research shows that travellers are increasingly seeking out adventure travel and natural spaces as travel restrictions lift, and they are more concerned about the environment and sustainability than before.¹⁹

Visitor zoning guidance

- [Tourism and visitor management in protected areas: Guidelines for sustainability](#) – IUCN
- [Recreation Opportunity Spectrum](#) – US Department of Agriculture
- [Visitor Capacity Guidebook and Monitoring Guidebook](#) – Interagency Visitor Use Management Council

Consultation and coordination: As part of risk assessment and visitor planning processes, managers should consult with government health departments and tourism boards to get the most applicable and timely advice. Also communicate with tourism operators, licence and concession holders that frequent the park. The public, and especially gateway communities, should be incorporated in this consultation process to review safety protocols. If workshops and physical meetings are not possible to convene stakeholders, consider using social media, webinars and conference calls.

Consultation during a pandemic

In South Africa community engagements for the Greater Kruger Strategic Development Programme continued under appropriate lockdown measures, within the prescriptions of relevant protocols for in-person meetings and using virtual platforms. For example, during the COVID-19 lockdown, consultation took place

⁽¹⁷⁾ Pers. Com. Jim Sanos, WWF-US, August 2020.

⁽¹⁸⁾ See, for example, Barkham, P. (2020). 'The worst of human nature': UK staycationers' trail of destruction.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Tripadvisor (2020). [Beyond COVID-19: the road to recovery for the travel industry](#); Publicis Sapient and Skift (2020). [What can COVID-19 teach the airline industry about sustainability](#); Bremner, C. (2020). [Travel 2040: Sustainability and digital transformation as recovery drivers](#).



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Market research shows that travellers are increasingly seeking out adventure travel and natural spaces as travel restrictions lift. Tourist lodges at Lango camp, Odzala-Kokoua National Park, Republic of the Congo. (Congo Conservation Company)

through 46 virtual meetings with government, private sector, NGOs, tertiary institutions and community partners. Consultation on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, and stabilising and recovery strategies took place by phone or through virtual meeting platforms. Workshops also took place with the Royal leadership and traditional authorities bordering the Kruger National Park, where COVID-19 regulations were observed at suitable venues, with a maximum of 50 delegates each.

Managing interactions between wildlife and people: Most zoonotic diseases (including COVID-19) arise from unsustainable exploitation of nature.²⁰ More frequent contact makes it more likely that potential pathogens will jump from wildlife to humans (and, in some circumstances, from humans to wildlife)²¹. Chimpanzees and gorillas are highly susceptible to respiratory

viruses.²² This is a particularly high risk for non-human primates like mountain gorillas that are habituated. Stringent contingency plans, including the complete closure of tourism, are being developed to avoid transmission of the virus.²³ Managers need to take precautions where wildlife and visitors are in proximity, to prevent transmission of COVID-19, and the emergence of new zoonotic diseases.

Wildlife tourism guidance

- [Best practice guidelines for Great Ape Tourism](#) – IUCN
- [Great apes, COVID-19 and the SARS CoV-2](#) – IUCN
- [Responsible images of primates](#) – IUCN Primate Specialist Group Section for Human Primate Interactions
- [Gorilla Friendly Tourism](#) – Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network
- [Animal welfare guidelines](#) – ABTA

⁽²⁰⁾ Jones K.E., N.G. Patel, M.A. Levy, A. Storeygard, D. Balk, J.L. Gittleman and P. Daszak (2008). Global trends in emerging infectious diseases. *Nature*, 451: 990–993.

⁽²¹⁾ Hockings M. et al. (2020). *Op. cit.*

⁽²²⁾ Gibbons A. (2020). Ape researchers mobilize to save primates from coronavirus. *Science*, 368(6491): 566. Doi:10.1126/science.368.6491.566-a.

⁽²³⁾ Hockings M. et al. (2020). *Op. cit.*

Managing visits safely: Visitors need to be protected from transmission of the disease both (a) before visitors arrive and (b) during their visit.

Before visitors arrive

Where and when they can visit: Provide information on which protected areas are open for visitors, and information on which locations and facilities are accessible. This ensures that their expectations are realistic, and they can plan their visits accordingly. Their planning should also consider their route from home to the protected area, including how they stay safe (and keep gateway communities safe) on their journey. This includes border control requirements,²⁴ travel bubble conditions, Travel Passports, vaccination cards, and any localised social issues relating to travellers,²⁵ and that these conditions may change rapidly.²⁶ Ensure that the protected area website is up-to-date, and use news outlets and social media to communicate news updates.

Visitor advice and communications

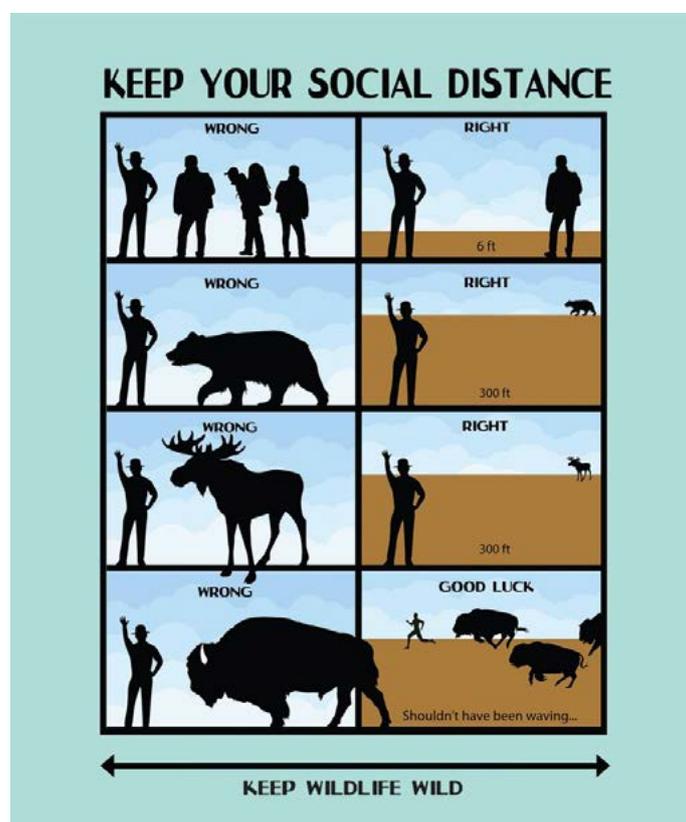
- [Visiting parks and recreational facilities: Protect yourself and others from COVID-19](#) - Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- [Traveller COVID-19 hub](#) - WTTC
- [#RecreateResponsibly](#) - #RecreateResponsibly
- [Recomendaciones para una visita segura \(video\)](#) - Corporacion Nacional Forestal, Chile
- [How to visit during COVID19](#) - Parks Canada

Online reservation systems

- [Yosemite National Park Ticketed Entry](#) - recreation.gov
- [Parks Canada Reservation service](#) - Parks Canada

Make reservations: Provide an online system for day visitors, overnight tourists and tour operators to make pre-bookings and reservations for their visit. This allows managers to anticipate and control numbers of arrivals over space and time, and to limit the risk of overcrowding that may constrain adequate social distancing. If access to the protected area is controlled (e.g. with an entrance gate) and credible testing is in place, consider asking visitors to bring a medical declaration or vaccine certificate with them to show on arrival.

Give visitors advice on what to bring: Visitors need to play their part in taking responsibility for their own health. Ideally visitors should be self-sufficient and pack hygiene supplies including masks and hand sanitiser. Bringing their own food and equipment also helps to reduce their risk.



⁽²⁴⁾ CBC News (2020). [Officials crack down on Alaska-bound travellers crossing US-Canada border](#), CBC.

⁽²⁵⁾ Steward B. (2020). [COVID-19 travel advisories create tensions in BC tourist towns](#), CBC.

⁽²⁶⁾ BBC (2020). [Covid: 14-day quarantine for Spain to NI travellers](#), BBC News; BBC (2020). [Coronavirus: Brits returning from France will have to self-isolate](#), BBC.

Left, top to bottom: Infographics from the World Travel and Tourism Council and US National Parks Service (NPS/Matt Turner)

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During visits

Screening: Consider screening visitor arrivals at entrance points for COVID-19 symptoms (e.g. high temperature), and/or requesting evidence of negative COVID-19 test results, vaccination certificate or Travel Passport. Protected areas need to decide how they will deal with any visitors arriving with symptoms, and make these clear to visitors – particularly if they have travelled considerable distances to arrive. Options may include refusal of entry or referral to appropriate medical services. Where possible, retain contact details of visitors in case they become ill with coronavirus within 14 days of their visit, in order to support contact tracing (ensuring that [data protection regulations](#) are followed).

Symptoms of coronavirus

- [Coronavirus – Symptoms – WHO](#)
- [Symptoms of coronavirus – Centres for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

Payments: Where technology allows, consider using paperless payment methods throughout the protected area. These include internet banking, credit cards, and mobile phone payment options. Where these are not possible, ensure that employees have appropriate equipment (e.g. gloves; sanitiser; hand washing facilities, in addition to masks).

Health and safety: Follow the advice of official public health experts in relation to cleaning, hygiene and physical distances throughout the protected area. Ensure that the frequency of cleaning and maintenance is adequate in all areas (e.g. visitor centres, toilets, eating areas etc.) and provide adequate hand-washing and hand sanitiser stations.

Health and safety guidance

- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public – WHO](#)
- [Detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA in fecal specimens of patients with confirmed COVID-19: A meta-analysis – Journal of Infection](#)

Below: Republic of Korea (2020) [Korea National Park Service \(KNPS\) response case: COVID-19 in the Republic of Korea](#)

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Visitor body temperature check



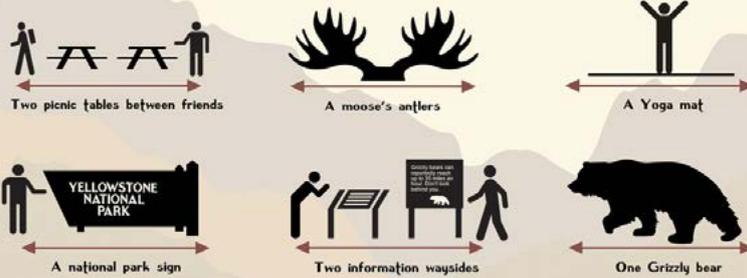
Visitor body temperature check



2 metre distancing campaign

A LITTLE SPACE GOES A LONG WAY

WHAT DOES 6 FT LOOK LIKE?

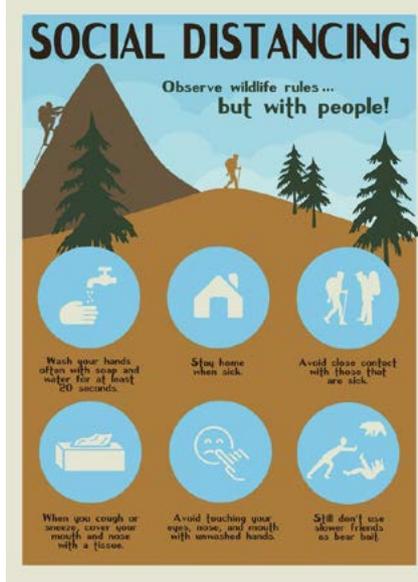


Looking for the best place for #socialdistancing? Many park areas remain accessible to provide that distance, but please do it safely and responsibly!

STAY SAFE AND RECREATE RESPONSIBLY

< >

Left and right:
US National Parks Service
graphics (NPS/Matt
Turner)



Signage: Provide well communicated signage on social distancing recommendations and other health and safety protocols (e.g. mask use; hand sanitiser).

Signage and communications

- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public – WHO](#)
- [COVID-19 guest communications – Travelife](#)
- [Communication resources – CDC](#)
- [Latest coronavirus updates – Cairngorms National Park](#)

Tours and activities in protected areas: Different types of tourist activities pose different risks and require different options to reduce the transmission of the virus. These relate to the equipment used, where activities take place, and whether they involve groups of people. For example, safaris are often in small groups, take place outdoors, and spacing and protection is relatively easy to implement.²⁷ Similarly, hiking and trekking can be a low-risk activity because it takes place in well-ventilated areas, has little equipment, is typically done in small groups and it is easy to use social distancing.²⁸

Guidance for specific tourism activities in protected areas

- [ATTA's Adventure Travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines](#) for wildlife safaris, trekking, rafting, cycling, cultural tours and sightseeing, culinary experience, skiing and snowboarding, and small vessel cruising.
- [Using trails safely and outdoor spaces safely in the wake of COVID-19 – Rails-to-Trails Conservancy](#)
- [Recomendaciones sanitarias para Trekking Seguro](#) (Spanish, English, German) – Fundación Trekkingchile

Accommodation and overnight stays: Visitors may stay overnight by camping or in accommodation within a protected area. Camping can be a relatively low-risk activity as it takes place in well-ventilated areas, with distanced accommodation.²⁹ Protected area managers need to pay attention to sanitation and distancing issues in planning how groups should be managed. They need to address issues such as their arrival, transport, accommodation, shelters, toilets, and waste, water, food and equipment.³⁰

Guidance for accommodation

- [Adventure Travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for camping and for small lodges](#) (e.g. lodges, guesthouses, bed & breakfasts, boutique accommodation and small hotels) – ATTA
- [Resource kit for accommodations – Travelife](#)
- [Operational considerations for COVID-19 management in the accommodation sector – WHO](#)
- Approved industry COVID-safe plans: [Queensland parks and wildlife service campgrounds – Queensland tourism and accommodation – Queensland Government](#)
- [Hotels and other guest accommodation – Gov.uk](#)
- [Camping during COVID-19 – Parks Canada](#)
- [Visitor guide to camping during COVID-19 – British Columbia Parks](#)

Food and drink: Catering options in protected areas may include indoor and outdoor self-catering (e.g. picnic and barbecue areas), restaurants, buffets and bars. Different culinary experiences need different strategies to reduce COVID-19 transmission. These include where there are risks of infected droplets on food, cutlery and crockery, or where there are places where people will touch things (e.g. chairs, tables, doors). In addition to standard food safety protocols (e.g. [ISO 22000](#) for food safety management), new procedures need to be considered to make these areas safe.

⁽²⁷⁾ ATTA (2020). [Wildlife safaris amid COVID-19: Recommendations](#). Adventure travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines, June 2020.

⁽²⁸⁾ ATTA (2020). [Trekking amid COVID-19: Recommendations](#). Adventure travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines, June 2020.

⁽²⁹⁾ ATTA (2020). [Camping amid COVID-19: Recommendations](#). Adventure travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines, June 2020.

⁽³⁰⁾ Adapted from ATTA (2020). [Camping amid COVID-19: Recommendations](#). Adventure travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines, June 2020.



Field inspections and staff training in Korea National Parks for COVID-19 responses: Source – Republic of Korea (2020) [Korea National Park Service \(KNPS\) response case: COVID-19 in the Republic of Korea](#)

Restaurant and catering guidance

- [Operational considerations for COVID-19 management in the accommodation sector](#) – WHO
- [Adventure Travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines](#) for culinary experience – ATTA
- Approved industry COVID-safe plans: [Restaurant and catering](#) – Queensland Government
- [Travel in the new normal: Industry guidance for promoting health and safety of all travellers](#) – US Travel Association
- [Restaurant reopening guidance](#) – National Restaurant Association

Workforce considerations: Protected area employees need training, information and equipment, including planning for visitor arrival (e.g. any new online ticketing protocols). This is particularly important for ‘frontline’ hospitality staff members who interact directly with visitors, including:

- Equipment to provide: Masks, hand-washing facilities with soap and water; hand sanitiser.
- Infrastructure to install: Plexiglass barriers at information and payment centres, food serveries and tills.
- Processes to instil: Good hygiene, mask-wearing, social distancing, cleaning of communal areas, management of waste.
- Guidance to share: Information that can be given to visitors regarding COVID-19, precautions and facilities; how to temperature screen people; symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do.
- Visitor management: Assume that visitors will not always respect rules about social distancing, face-covering and congregating, and how to manage their behaviour while avoiding conflict.

Workforce guidance

- [Q&A: Working in hotels and COVID-19](#) – World Health Organisation
- [Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) – Gov.uk
- [Tourism industry guidelines for coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) – Victoria State Government
- Staff and safety management – in [Korea National Park Service \(KNPS\) response case: COVID-19 in the Republic of Korea](#) – Republic of Korea
- [Travel industry guidelines for sectors re-opening in one place](#) – Skift
- [Adventure Travel COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines](#) – Adventure Travel Trade Association
- [Tourism and hospitality COVID-19 resilient training - Free online consultations](#) – Travelife
- [Quick restart guide for employers](#) – International Chamber of Commerce

Financing interventions: Funding for visitor-related COVID-19 response measures may need to come from existing budgets that are re-allocated or from new financing. This may be particularly challenging where protected area expenditures rely on tourism incomes. Some protected areas and operators have established crowdsourcing platforms to provide funding to support conservation and livelihoods during the crisis, and there are also some grants available to sustain critical activities. Others may advocate for government or donor funding to sustain their activities during the crisis.

Reduced fees for tourism operators in protected areas

In Hong Kong’s country parks there has been a reduction of rentals required from refreshment kiosks, cafeteria and souvenir shops by 50 % for 6 months with retrospective effect from 1 October 2019.^{iv}

(iv) Pers. com. Fook Yee Wong, WCPA, e-mail, August 2020.



^

A wildlife tracker with a gorilla in the Dzanga-Sangha protected areas complex, Central African Republic. Chimpanzees and gorillas are highly susceptible to respiratory viruses. (© David Santiago)

Financing examples

Grants with EU funding:

- [Rapid Response Grants](#) – Biopama
- [SOS African Wildlife Rapid Action Grants](#) – IUCN Save Our Species

Crowdfunding by protected areas and operators:

- [Help us to help our local conservation partners & staff get through this crisis - Coronavirus Appeal](#) – Biosphere expeditions
- [Support us](#) – Kasanka Trust, Zambia
- [Make a donation](#) – [The Mara Triangle needs your help](#) (video) – Mara Conservancy, Kenya
- [Project ranger: preventing a poaching pandemic](#) – Great Plains Foundation
- [IXaus Lodge](#) and [Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge](#) relief fund, South Africa – Quicket
- [Randilen Wildlife Management Area Team](#) – JustGiving
- [Be a conservation hero](#) – Wilderness Safaris
- [Uniting to support Africa's rangers](#) – Wildlife Ranger Challenge
- [Coming together for Mara Naboisho COVID-19 appeal](#) – Crowdfunder

Where protected areas are not able to open yet: If a protected area is not yet able to re-open, then provide other options for visitors to experience the attractions. Online safaris and links to webcams are increasingly becoming a valuable resource for those who are in lockdown, or cannot travel, to experience natural areas. These experiences may help people's mental health and reduce stress³¹, while reminding people where they can visit once restrictions are lifted.

Online protected area experiences

- [safariLIVE](#) – WildEarth
- [Kids](#) – WildEarth – WildEarth
- [Wildlife and nature](#) – Lonely Planet
- [Experiences TV: Hiking the Villarrica National Park, Chile](#) – andBeyond
- [Virtual shuttle tour at Zion National Park](#) – YouTube
- [10 virtual tours of the world's natural wonders](#) – The Guardian
- [The hidden worlds of the National Parks](#) – Google Arts & culture
- [Exploring World Heritage from home with UNESCO](#) – UNESCO
- [Dive in virtually to protect our oceans](#) – UNEP

⁽³¹⁾ McCarthy N. (2020). [Covid-19's widespread impact on mental health](#), Statista.

Cover image: tourists in South Africa photograph a leopard. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on wildlife tourism.

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Disclaimer: The contents of this briefing paper are intended to supplement and not replace information from the World Health Organization (WHO) and governmental advice. Ongoing scientific research is rapidly changing our understanding of the coronavirus transmission, and therefore it is likely that this guidance will change over time.

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