Tourism’s plastic pollution problem

Plastic pollution is one of the major environmental challenges of our time, and tourism has an important role to play in contributing to the solution. Much of the plastic used in tourism is made to be thrown away and often can’t be recycled, leading to large amounts of pollution.

With 80 per cent of all tourism taking place in coastal areas, plastic pollution from tourism can easily end up in oceans and waterways.

When not recycled, a single plastic bottle takes hundreds of years to degrade, polluting waterways and outdoor spaces for centuries. The production of more than 300 million tonnes of new plastic every year also depletes natural resources and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

Globally, we produce 300 million tonnes of new plastic every year.

A single plastic bottle takes hundreds of years to degrade.

Marine litter in the Mediterranean increases by up to 40 per cent during peak tourist season.

It’s time for tourism to take on plastic pollution

Tourism companies and destinations have been making great strides towards reducing their environmental impact and operating in harmony with nature. Taking action on plastic pollution and transitioning to circularity in the use of plastics is critical to increase sustainability in the sector, and can help stop plastic ending up as pollution while also reducing the amount of new plastic that needs to be produced.

The problem of plastic pollution in tourism is too big for any single organisation to fix on its own. To match the scale of the problem, changes need to take place across the whole tourism value chain. Which is why tourism stakeholders around the world are working together and taking a systemic approach through the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative.
Supporting the tourism sector to take action on plastic pollution

The Global Tourism Plastics Initiative will support companies, destinations, associations, and NGOs through:

- Sharing information about the plastic pollution challenge and the solutions being implemented across the sector
- Fostering procurement practices that consider the plastic footprint of products and services and encourage circularity in the use of plastics
- Promoting innovation and facilitating the cooperation between governments, local organisations, and businesses
- Consolidating the progress reported by all signatories and establishing a performance benchmark
- Publicly communicating the actions taken by signatories and showcasing the leadership of the sector

By taking serious action in a coordinated manner on plastic pollution, the tourism sector can help preserve and protect the places and wildlife that make destinations worth visiting.

Join the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative
Get in touch to find out how you can be part of the solution to plastic pollution: