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UN NEWS CENTRE



UN agency spotlights tourism's potential to promote conservation



Melting sea-ice in the Arctic

13 August 2010 – With the rate of ice breaking off icebergs and glaciers picking up pace, the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) is calling for an innovative way to help conserve the Arctic's unique habitat: sustainable tourism.

In Svalbard – a picturesque archipelago in northern Norway which is the closest that visitors can usually get to the North Pole, 1,000 kilometres away – a joint campaign by conservation groups and tour operators in the 1990s has helped set up protected areas and new laws protecting biodiversity.

Polar bears and other native species now have protected status in Svalbard, with the hunting of many species being outlawed.

In a bid to replicate these successes, UNEP and its partner GRID-Arendal in Norway plan to examine how sustainable tourism can help to support the management and development of protected areas.

According to Peter Prokosch, Director of GRID-Arendal, the polar region is one of the most persuasive examples of the need to invest in protecting the planet.

“This is because the polar regions are the ideal place to see the link between the impact of climate change and biodiversity,” he said.

Later this month, UNEP and GRID-Arendal will host a study expedition to Svalbard for conservationists, journalists and members of the public, with a tour of Antarctica to teach people about the development of marine protected areas in the Southern Hemisphere slated for November.

They also plan to create an interactive map of tourist destinations engaged in conservation work to allow travelers to view a destination's green credentials before embarking on their trip.

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