Tourism Performance Toolkit

A tourism rapid assessment toolkit for Conservation Areas

SDI | Safari Defenders Initiative

About

Most conservation areas in Africa benefit from world-class conservation expertise but struggle to generate sufficient tourism revenue to sustain operations, fund protection and restoration efforts, and create meaningful opportunities for local communities to thrive.

Strengthening tourism, especially through sustainable and regenerative models, is essential. However, many conservation areas still grapple with a key question: Where do we start and what should we focus on?

This toolkit offers a simple yet effective way for conservation area managers to identify where high-impact interventions are needed to boost tourism and make it work for conservation.

The toolkit was developed by the Safari Defender Initiative and with expert input from over 20 sustainable and regenerative tourism organizations.

The Safari Defender Initiative

A coalition of sustainable and regenerative tourism organizations working to supercharge tourism and impact in Africa's underfunded and under-touristed conservation areas.

Vision

Transform Africa's underfunded and undervalued conservation areas into thriving, self-sustaining landscapes using regenerative and sustainable tourism models

Mission

Co-create scalable solutions with underfunded conservation areas in Africa to boost tourism revenue, support livelihoods, and protect biodiversity—guided by a USD $1,000/km² annual benchmark.

The Dual Challenge of Africa's Protected and Conserved Areas

- Financial Vulnerability: Over-reliance on volatile donor funding while underutilizing tourism's revenue potential

- **Underperforming tourism:** Weak tourism infrastructure/service quality limits revenue and impact despite biodiversity assets

Africa has over 9,000 conservation areas[1] protecting biodiversity, ecosystems, and livelihoods, with tourism positioned as the main revenue driver supporting all these.

To remain sustainable, these areas need at least USD 1,000/km²/year plus regenerative interventions.[2]

Despite world-class expertise, 70-90% of Africa's conservation areas are underfunded[3] and struggle with underperforming tourism models that fail to generate sufficient revenue and impact.[4]

[1]https://www.protectedplanet.net/region/AF
[2]https://www.awf.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/202211_factsheet_sustainable_financing_v3.pdf
[3]https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/202308_apac_report_v9_jl_compressed.pdf
[4]https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-013-En.pdf

Coalition Partners

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Glossary of Terms

Accommodation Efficiency
How well hotels or lodges use water, energy, and materials without waste, while still providing a good guest experience.

Benchmark ($1,000/km²/year)
The minimum income a conservation area should aim to earn from tourism each year per square kilometer to stay financially and environmentally sustainable.

Conservation Area
A protected natural space, like a park, reserve, or conservancy, set aside and managed to protect wildlife and natural resources.

Destination Marketing
Activities that promote the conservation area to attract the right kind of tourists.

Financial Sustainability
The ability of a conservation area to generate enough income—mostly from tourism—to cover its costs and support conservation work.

Impact Measurement Framework
A method for checking what positive (or negative) results tourism and conservation efforts are having on nature, people, and the local economy.

Revenue Sufficiency Check
A simple tool that helps managers see if their tourism income meets the recommended benchmark.

Sustainability Best Practices
Industry recommended practices for minimizing environmental, social, and economic harm in places where a business operates

Tourism Infrastructure and Amenities
The basic systems and services needed for tourism to work—like roads, internet, waste systems, and safety services.

Tourism Model
The main approach a conservation area uses to attract visitors and ensure tourism helps both conservation and local people.

01
How to Use the Toolkit

01 Who this toolkit is for

Conservation Area Managers Working in underfunded and under-touristed Conservation Areas in Africa

This toolkit is intended for conservation area managers overseeing national parks, wildlife reserves, community conservancies, private conservancies, and sanctuaries across Africa. It is designed for areas that already have some level of tourism activity.

02 Application

A Rapid Assessment Tool

This toolkit is designed for rapid assessments, and its effectiveness depends on the accuracy of the information provided.

Close coordination with the **conservation area's tourism department (**if any) is strongly encouraged.

The toolkit is divided into two sections: Revenue Sufficiency Check and Tourism Model Gap Assessment.

This toolkit is designed to be used alongside the assessment scoring tool (Excel document).

Users are expected to enter their revenue and tourism performance data into the Excel file,
which automatically analyzes the inputs and generates a report on the tourism status of the conservation area.

02

Financial Sustainability (Revenue Assessment)

Conservation areas require approximately $1,000/km²/year to effectively fulfill their conservation objectives. This section of the toolkit helps conservation areas quickly determine whether tourism revenue meets the $1,000/km²/year threshold needed.

Purpose: Diagnose whether current tourism income meets the $1,000/km²/year benchmark and evaluate funding sustainability.

Q1. What is the total land area of your conservation area (in square kilometers)?

Q2. What was the average annual tourism revenue that funded conservancy operations over the past 2 years (USD)?

Q3. What was the average annual revenue from non-tourism economic activities that funded conservancy operations over the past 2 years (USD)?

Instruction

If the combined average annual revenue (tourism + non-tourism) divided by the total land area is less than USD 1,000 per km² per year, please proceed to Section 2.

Even if revenue exceeds USD 1,000 per km² per year, conservation areas may still proceed to Section 2 if they wish to better understand and strengthen the performance of their tourism model

03

Tourism Gap Assessment

Conservation areas need effective tourism models that not only generate reliable income and protect ecosystems but also ensure that the people and economies dependent on these spaces

Purpose: Uncover weaknesses in marketing, visitor offerings, and sustainability that limit revenue potential and impact.

Instruction

For each statement, rate how true it is for your conservation area on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = Strongly Disagree (This is not happening at all) and 5 = Strongly Agree (This is fully in place and working well). Low scores show areas where support or improvement is most needed.

For each statement, rate how true it is for your conservation area on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = Strongly Disagree (This is not happening at all) and 5 = Strongly Agree (This is fully in place and working well).

01: Destination Branding and Marketing

Why

A clear brand and effective marketing attract the right type of visitor, increase awareness of the conservation area, and help build long-term demand

Q1. Our conservation area has a well-developed, active destination marketing strategy targeting appropriate domestic and international markets

Q3. The marketing strategy was developed using a participatory, multi-stakeholder process and has been widely shared with tourism stakeholders

Q2. We have a clear and compelling brand identity with defined unique selling points that differentiate our conservation area from others.

02: Design and Packaging of Unique and Impactful Experiences

Why

Well-packaged experiences increase visitor satisfaction and stay duration, improve income, and help tell a meaningful conservation and community story

Q1. We offer a diverse range of well-designed travel packages that appeal to different visitor interests and price points. (Visitors can stay more than 2 nights without repeating the same activities)

Q3. These packages are effectively promoted and sold through travel agents, tour operators, a conservation area booking website etc.

Q3. These travel packages actively involve local communities in the design and implementation of the activities.

Q4. These travel packages are designed to protect and help regenerate the ecosystems in the conservation area

03: Accommodation Quality

Why Accommodation quality directly impacts visitor satisfaction and return rates. It also reflects the professionalism and uniqueness of the destination while creating opportunities for promoting environmental conservation and the local culture

Q1. We have diverse accommodation offerings that are professionally managed, with consistent service quality and guest satisfaction.

Q2. Accommodation architecture and landscape design reflect sustainability best practices and enhance the natural and cultural appeal of our conservation area

04: Accommodation Efficiency

Why Efficient accommodations reduce operational costs and enhance guest comfort, while also supporting local livelihoods and environmental protection, key concerns for today's conscious travelers

Q1. We use digital booking and property management systems to streamline reservations and guest services.

Q2. Our accommodation facilities are energy efficient, with clear efforts to reduce energy consumption.

Q3. Our accommodation facilities and tourism activities have systems in place for water conservation and responsible water usage.

Q4. Our accommodation facilities follow efficient and cost-effective procurement practices, with most products being locally sourced and sustainably produced.

Q5. Our accommodation facilities and tourism activities implement effective waste management practices that promote, reuse, recycling, repurposing, and elimination of single-use items

For each statement, rate how true it is for your conservation area on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = Strongly Disagree (This is not happening at all) and 5 = Strongly Agree (This is fully in place and working well).

05: Human Resource Development

Why

Skilled and motivated staff are essential for delivering quality experiences, increasing guest satisfaction, and reducing operational risks

Q1. Our hotel operations staff are well-trained in hospitality best practices and deliver a high standard of service

Q2. Our tour guides are professionally trained, knowledgeable about conservation and culture, and enhance the visitor experience

Q3.Local communities are prioritized, with more than half of all tourism jobs reserved for local residents

06: Essential Tourism Infrastructure and Amenities

Why

Reliable infrastructure supports safety, access, digital visibility, and visitor satisfaction, all of which are essential for a functioning tourism destination

Q1. Emergency services (medical, security, evacuation) are accessible and functional for both visitors and staff.

Q2. The conservation area has reliable ICT infrastructure and services that support digital marketing, guest services, and operations

Q3. The site is accessible through multiple and sustainable transport options

Q4. Tourism infrastructure is designed to accommodate all visitors, including persons with disabilities

For each statement, rate how true it is for your conservation area on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = Strongly Disagree (This is not happening at all) and 5 = Strongly Agree (This is fully in place and working well).

07: Impact Measurement, Sustainability Planning

Why
Demonstrating environmental and social responsibility improves trust with local communities, partners, and travelers, especially those seeking ethical travel.

Q1. We have a system for tracking and reporting the environmental, social, and economic impacts of tourism in the conservation area

Q2. Our sustainability performance is independently reviewed or accredited by recognized third party eco-certification bodies.

Q3. We have a formal sustainability plan, not more than 5 year old, that guides decision-making and tourism development

Q4. Our tourism model is strongly linked to the protection and promotion of human rights, labor rights, and the empowerment of local communities

Q5. Our tourism model is strongly connected to the restoration and regeneration of ecosystems and habitats within our conservation area.

04
Next Steps
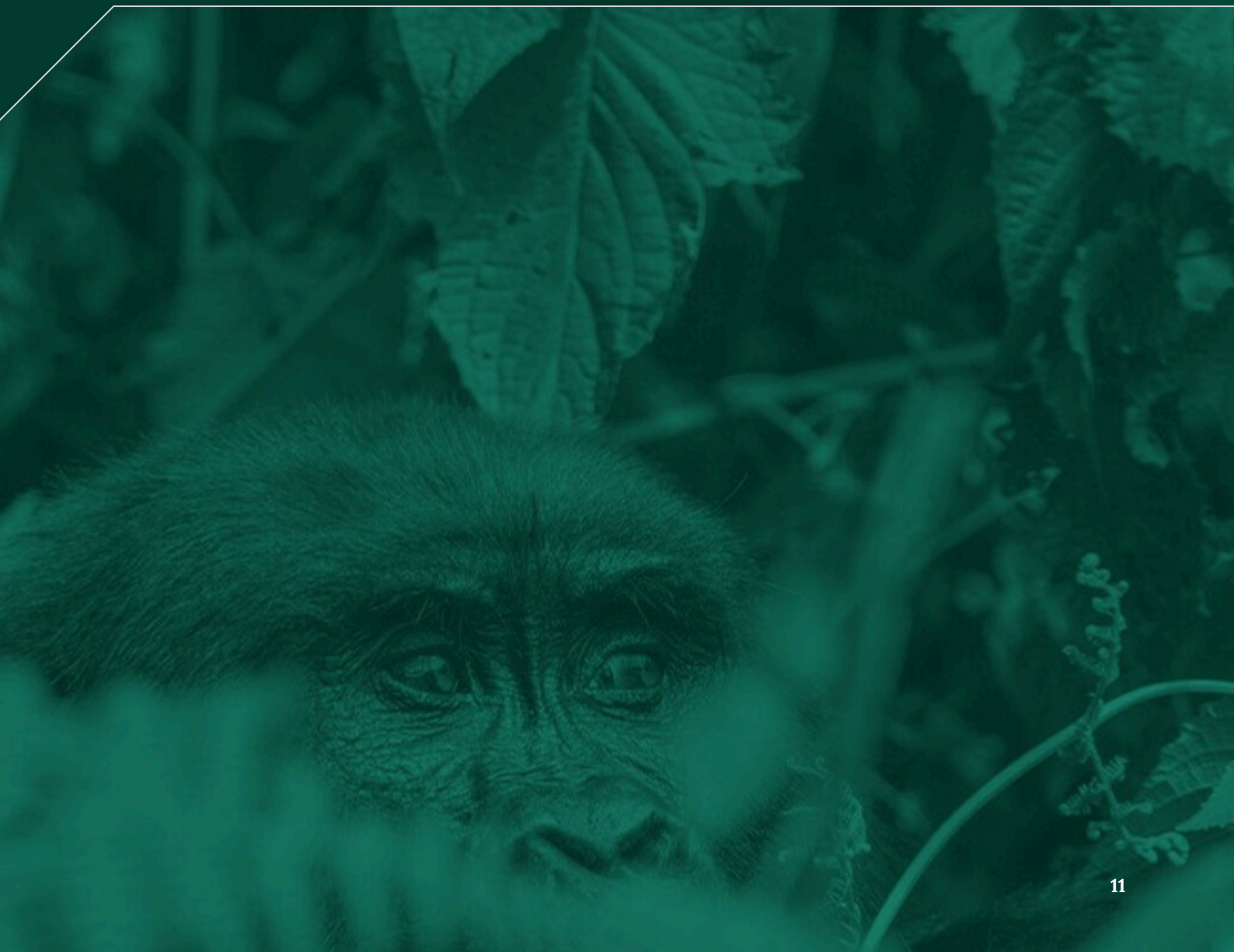
What Next After The Assessment

01   Counter check

Counter check if all information has be accurately captured in the excel document

02   Request for Support

In case the conservation area has challenges in using the tool, reach out to SDI and one of our team members will help you in completing the assessment

03   Send Report

Please email the completed Excel document to SDI together with supporting documents, e.g. proof of conservancy registration, a marketing plan etc.
Our team will then reach out to verify the information provided and gain a deeper understanding of your tourism strengthening needs

04   Site Visit

Our team will plan for a site visit to develop a plan for implementing high priority tourism strengthening interventions

SDI | Safari Defenders Initiative

Transforming Tourism in Africa's Protected and Conserved Areas for Sustainability and Positive Impact