

Information Sheet:

Whale watching – the benefits

Today, commercial whale watching is a well-established, rapidly expanding industry in many parts of the world. It is worth over US\$1 billion and attracts millions of tourists each year in over 90 countries and territories. Many developing countries could boost their income from this sustainable type of eco-tourism.



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Whale watching is a truly memorable experience. It offers a unique opportunity to see at close hand some of the largest animals on Earth in their natural environment, without threatening their health or welfare. Despite a brutal co-existence in the recent past, whales and humans maintain a curiosity for each other. Where whale watching is properly regulated and managed, whales can be seen happily going about their natural activities undisturbed.

Whale watching makes an important contribution to the economy of many countries and is emerging as an

industry in many others. In the highly competitive global tourism industry, maintaining a country's tourism image is critically important. A country's support for whaling may detrimentally affect its tourism industry because of tourists' negative attitudes toward whaling.

As well as its economic value, whale watching provides great educational and social benefits, and promotes education and research. It increases awareness and appreciation of whales and their environment.

Whales are often highly migratory so a whale hunted and killed is lost forever to the whale watching industry possibly thousands of miles away. Hunting whales is also likely to lead to a change in their behaviour. Whales that have been chased are unlikely to allow whale watching boats to approach them. Equally, whales that are familiar with whale watching boats will have little reason to fear whaling vessels until it is too late.

Whaling is highly subsidised. Despite these subsidies, consumption levels of whale meat are poor or declining. Whale watching is rarely subsidised and a whale can go on providing value for many years if not killed. In short, a whale is worth much more alive than dead.

Benefits from whale watching

- In 2004, ecotourism/nature tourism was growing globally three times faster than the tourism industry as a whole. (World Tourism Organization, press release, June 2004).
- Tourism is a principal export (foreign exchange earner) for 83% of developing countries, and the leading export for one-third of the poorest countries. (World Tourism Organization, *World Tourism Barometer*, January 2005).
- The number of whale watchers is increasing at 12% a year, three times faster than overall tourism numbers (Hoyt, *Whale watching 2001: worldwide tourism numbers, expenditures, and expanding socioeconomic benefits*).
- In the Caribbean whale watching is a US\$10 million industry (International Fund for Animal Welfare, 2006) and a recent estimate by the Caribbean Whale Conservation Forum put potential income earned by a regional whale watching industry at about US\$24 million a year.



Protecting Whales A global responsibility