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THE BLOG

Inspiring New Champions for Our Seas



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Off the coast of West Papua, Indonesia, the waters off the Bird’s Head peninsula teem with 1,765 different species of fish and 600 variations of hard coral—more species than anywhere else in the world, all within a magical bay pierced by giant boulder islands.

But that wasn’t always the case. Years of “blast fishing” and other illegal practices nearly decimated Bird’s Head. Community members worked alongside the government and NGOs to protect this “cauldron of evolution,” and, today, Bird’s Head’s 12 marine protected areas encompass an area of coastal and marine habitats about the size of Great Britain.



Conservation International/photo by Sterling Zumbrunn

I was introduced to this special place by a Conservation International film—which The Tiffany & Co. Foundation helped produce—that uses virtual reality technology to transport viewers to the waters of the Bird’s Head to experience, first hand, this wonder of nature. The film [Valen’s Reef](#) will debut on June 20 at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity.

At the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, [we invest in many ocean conservation and awareness-raising programs](#) and I have seen several different approaches to this work over the years, but I believe one of the most effective ways to secure global champions for our oceans is to partner with the travel and tourism industry.

Last year, the [tourism sector generated US\\$7.2 trillion](#), contributing nearly 10 percent to the global GDP. With [80 percent of all tourism located in coastal areas](#), this presents a powerful opportunity to empower travelers, the tourism industry, and local communities to conserve coastal and marine areas.

According to Lonely Planet, [70 percent of travelers expect companies to demonstrate a commitment to preserving the natural environment](#). The responsible travel trend is here to stay. The great news is that there are many opportunities for hotels, resorts, cruise lines, recreation outfitters, and tour guides to support this trend.

One of the simplest avenues for the sector to make a difference is by partnering with nonprofit organizations that are already invested in protecting marine ecosystems. For instance, one of our grantees, the [Coral Reef Alliance](#), works across Fiji, Hawaii, Honduras, Indonesia, and Mexico to improve reef management, benefit local communities, reduce reef threats, and ensure sustainable tourism.

In addition to companies partnering with nonprofits and raising awareness among guests, in some protected areas diving and recreation fees support conservation by contributing to the long-term sustainability of marine protected areas. Not only does this create a resilient source of funds for these protected areas, but they also serve as a natural draw for tourists, which generates growth for the industry.

Every tourist can consider sustainable choices that reduce their impact on the ocean—from choosing hotels that limit pollution and the impact of infrastructure on the local environment, to booking with tour guides and outfitters that partner with local conservation groups.

You can also become an ambassador for your favorite coastal spot by sharing what you learn about ocean conservation with others. If you are an avid marine sports aficionado, there are many international networks that help like-minded people protect the resources that support their activities. [Sailors for the Sea](#)—a foundation grantee that organizes the sailing and boating community—runs programs such as Clean Regattas, which has certified 800 regattas to reduce the impacts of these events.

In my travels to some of the world’s most beautiful ocean locations—from the Caribbean to Hawaii—I have been struck by the varied state of coral and marine wildlife. After a recent trip to

Mauritius, where The Tiffany & Co. Foundation is funding work with the Wildlife Conservation Society, I saw how partnerships could help protect vital ocean ecosystems.

I have taken time to examine what works and what doesn't when it comes to different models of conservation, and learning about the efforts of our partners and watching the Bird's Head film give me hope about the potential to save our seas by engaging the tourism industry.

Today, more than a billion people travel internationally. Just imagine if each one became a champion for our seas.

This post is part of a series produced by The Huffington Post in partnership with [Ocean Unite](#), an initiative to unite and activate powerful voices for ocean-conservation action. The series is being produced to coincide with World Ocean Day (June 8), as part of HuffPost's "[What's Working](#)" initiative, putting a spotlight on initiatives around the world that are solutions oriented. To read all the posts in the series, read [here](#). Follow the conversation on Twitter with the hashtag #MakeASplash.