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The Ramsar Convention and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) join forces to celebrate World Wetlands Day – *Wetland Tourism: a great experience*

2 February 2012 - From the Great Barrier Reef to the Okavango Delta to the Danube Delta and many other thousands of wetlands, the human love for watery places has sustained tourism and recreation in wetlands around the world for countless decades.

2 February each year is World Wetlands Day. Ramsar's focus on wetland tourism to celebrate this year's World Wetlands Day (WWD) has opened the way for the Convention and UNWTO to join forces in exploring common issues and concerns and collaborate in advancing sustainable tourism development in the wetlands.

As Ramsar's Secretary General Anada Tiéga notes: "This has been an excellent opportunity for the Ramsar Convention to take advantage of UNWTO's expertise in the sustainable management of tourism, and we appreciate the added value they have brought to our World Wetlands Day activities promoting the wise use of wetlands."

"Every year, millions of tourists fulfil their longing to see and experience the wonders of nature in the wetlands. Celebrating World Wetlands Day under the theme of wetland tourism gives the perfect occasion to recall the relevance of this unique natural scenery as one of tourism's greatest assets and a fundamental cornerstone to its long-term growth while stressing how tourism, when developed and managed in a sustainable way, can be instrumental in safeguarding it," said UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai.

Responsible, sustainable tourism can support wetland conservation and wise use. Wetlands, their wildlife, and the human communities in and around them can benefit directly from tourism through entry fees, sale of local products, and so on. At the same time, the 'use' of wetlands as tourism locations comes with certain risks. The challenge is to ensure that sustainable tourism practices are being implemented and bring benefits for wetlands, their wildlife and people. As Mr. Rifai adds: "We would emphasize that tourism businesses, if well informed and prepared to adapt their operations, can certainly promote and support wetland biodiversity and the natural beauty of wetlands."

Ramsar's interest in tourism will not end with World Wetlands Day. The focus on wetland tourism will continue at the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP11) in July 2012, in Romania, celebrated under the theme *Wetlands, Tourism and Recreation*.

COP 11 will debate an important Resolution on wetlands and tourism, one that will point the way forward and express the Contracting Parties' commitment to sound tourism practices. Mr. Anada Tiéga emphasizes that "the adoption of this Resolution will provide a formal framework for governments, NGOs and civil society for achieving sustainability in wetland tourism".

Also at COP11, the Ramsar Secretariat, in collaboration with UNWTO, will be launching a case study-based report on tourism in and around Wetlands of International Importance, looking at the direct and indirect impacts of tourism on Ramsar Sites and other wetlands while identifying both the many opportunities and the threats that wetland tourism can bring. Research will also identify key messages for main target groups – land-use as well as wetland policy-makers, local governments, tourism developers, wetland site managers, and others.

A suite of materials have been prepared to support the celebrations of WWD around the world and inspire countries to organize tourism-focused events for this annual wetland-awareness campaign day.

The WWD materials are just the first look at wetlands and tourism, and the 'great experience' this can be.

The Ramsar Secretariat looks forward to hearing about World Wetlands Day activities and takes this opportunity to wish you a *Happy World Wetlands Day*.

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For World Wetlands Day materials visit: www.ramsar.org/WWD/

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