

The ICRAN Mesoamerican Reef Alliance (ICRAN MAR)
Sustainable Tourism Along the
Mesoamerican Barrier Reef

Voluntary implementation of the ICRAN MAR marine recreation standards for diving, snorkeling, and boat operations activities

Program Objectives

1. Utilize results-oriented indicators to demonstrate the effectiveness of the standards and devise checklists for self and third-party assessment of industry compliance;
2. Determine attainability, affordability, and effectiveness of the ICRAN MAR standards for marine recreation operators;
3. Identify the return on investment for operators (i.g. better trained staff, increased customer satisfaction, return business, new markets based on sustainable performance);
4. Identify successes, challenges, needs and performance gaps in implementation through collection of data and quarterly narrative progress reports;
5. Document the role that standards implementation plays in private sector support for marine protected areas;
6. Identify stakeholder priority needs for subsequent actions;
7. Present year one results and data analysis at national learning workshops (end of ICRAN MAR phase 1) and identify next steps for regional implementation of the standards and code of conduct.

Methodology

CORAL, with support from UNEP-DTIE and WWF, will engage operators throughout Mesoamerica directly in a standards testing pilot program, seeking to recruit businesses to participate in an official capacity. A letter of agreement will be signed with each participating business for the purpose of clarifying the components of the program, as well as requirements to participate – i.e. what benefits companies will receive and in turn what will be expected of participating operators.

The pilot testing program aims to evaluate and further validate the standards in their implementation. CORAL will create a simple, user-friendly web platform to assist the data collection and analysis. A minimum of four mechanisms should be utilized for data collection during the initial nine-twelve months, or “testing” phase, of the program.

1. **Operator self-assessment** – R.B. Toth Associates and CORAL will develop a checklist based on requirements included in each ICRAN MAR standard. This

The ICRAN Mesoamerican Reef Alliance (ICRAN MAR)

Sustainable Tourism Along the

Mesoamerican Barrier Reef

checklist will allow operators to score themselves on the level of implementation they have achieved with the standards, and identify gaps for needed improvements. Operators will be encouraged to take a critical approach to self-assessment, versus trying to score their business in the best possible light. Operators will be asked to complete this checklist at three month intervals and report the information back to CORAL. It will be clearly stated to all participants during the recruitment process that all information collected will be kept confidential, and that no operator will be targeted for recalcitrance in implementing the voluntary standards.

2. **Narrative progress reports** – In conjunction with the operator self-assessment, participants will be asked to complete an online progress report/questionnaire that will assist in the identification of needs and challenges being faced in the implementation process, as well as documentation of progress achieved.
3. **Client exit surveys** – Operators will be asked to provide exit surveys to customers and then forward these surveys to CORAL for comparative data analysis. Exit surveys will be based on Annex B of the scuba diving standard and Annex A of the snorkeling standard.
4. **Anonymous auditors** – Following the first six months of self-assessment, CORAL will recruit anonymous auditors who measure and report back to CORAL on the compliance of participating operators.
5. **Cross-country peer-to-peer audits** – A complementary part of the operator self-assessment will be a peer-to-peer learning process where a two-three person team of operators from one region travel to another region in order to assess other operators and validate their data, as well as provide lessons learned (Note: this component is contingent on available budget resources.)

What incentives will be provided to businesses who agree to pilot test standards?

- 1) CORAL Business Membership – this incentive package would include:
 - CORAL business member certificate;
 - Copies of the CI-CORAL-TOI publication, *A Practical Guide to Good Practice* and CORAL's *Good Environmental Practice Guidelines* for use by their staff and distribution to tourists/clients;
 - Two free individual CORAL memberships;
 - Two CORAL calendars;
 - Business listing in CORAL's annual report (more than 8,000 copies distributed annually);
 - Promotion of the program and participating businesses in CORAL's electronic newsletter, *E-current*, which is distributed to 7,000 individuals and businesses four times a year;

The ICRAN Mesoamerican Reef Alliance (ICRAN MAR)
Sustainable Tourism Along the
Mesoamerican Barrier Reef

- Four quarterly newsletters on latest coral reef conservation efforts, including stories that highlight the work of our leading partners in the field.

For participants willing to support and promote CORAL at their place of business, the membership will include the following additional incentives:

- Creation of a page on CORAL's website for each participating business, plus a hyperlink to their business website;
- Unlimited use of the CORAL business member logo for your business.

Additionally, businesses that document notable improvements in their environmental performance through participation in the program will be given special attention in our electronic and print newsletters, and annual report.

2) Support from local institutions to create incentives for business participation in standards implementation, including:

- Mexico – Promotional Trust of the Riviera Maya; local and national media outlets;
- Belize – Belize Tourism Board; Belize Tourism Industry Association; local and national media outlets;
- Honduras – Roatan Chamber of Tourism; Marine Park Association; local and national media outlets