

Tourists Help Restore Coral Reefs in the Dominican Republic

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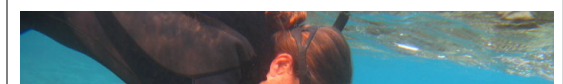


One of the biggest tourist attractions of the Dominican Republic and the other countries of the Caribbean is the natural coral reefs. Reef ecosystems, which occupy about 11% of the Dominican Republic's coastline, offer opportunities to explore rich marine biodiversity through activities such as snorkeling, diving, and, more recently, exploring coral gardens.

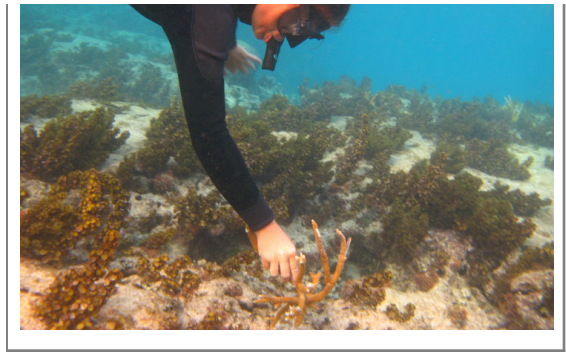
Coral gardening is a new activity that minimizes reef ecosystem degradation and its negative impact on marine life. It consists of developing underwater coral nurseries, using primarily rare and endangered coral species, and then transplanting them to degraded reefs in order to protect them and improve their health. Consequently, deteriorated coral reefs can again attract marine life and balance the surrounding ecosystem.

In the Dominican Republic, the creation of coral gardens is being promoted to tourists thanks to the project "Coral Gardening to Support Reef Conservation," developed by the **Multilateral Investment Fund** and the **Puntacana Ecological Foundation** (FEPC) since 2012.

This project aims to merge sun-and-sand tourism with elements of conservation, education, and



culture. Tourists interested in participating in coral gardening visit local communities and take a tour that allows them to observe and even participate in the entire process of creating, maintaining, and expanding the coral nurseries. This process begins with the collection of material from existing coral colonies.



Snorkelers dive underwater to carefully extract the precious coral, transport it to underwater nurseries, and secure it to frames made of rope and metal. When the corals in the nurseries grow, tissue fragments are pruned and a team transplants them to the degraded reefs. In the Dominican Republic, tourists can work with two species of endangered and eye-catching corals: staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*) and elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*).

Currently, Puntacana has the largest coral garden program in the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean. The FEPC has also created nurseries in Punta Rusia, Sosúa, and La Caleta National Underwater Park.

For communities in these tourist destinations, coral gardening means more income from the arrival of more tourists. In addition to those who come for the beautiful beaches, coral gardens also enhance scientific, academic, and volunteer tourism. Residents are also benefiting from new job opportunities in the development of coral gardens and indirect revenue from services such as transportation, food, and guided tours.



This project is expected to grow in coming years to stimulate the sustainable development of other tourism communities in the Dominican Republic while continuing to support the restoration of coral reefs threatened by climate change and human activities such as unsustainable urban and coastal tourism development, overfishing, overharvesting of marine species, and irresponsible recreational diving.

To learn more about this project please visit the [Puntacana Ecological Foundation](#).