

# How Tourism, Tourists, and Coastal Residents Can Be Stewards of Sea Turtles

Many of the quiet, sandy beaches at which turtles have nested for millennia are some of today's most popular vacation destinations around the globe. Coastal development near sea turtle habitats can be a detriment to the turtles' ancient nesting grounds and the waters in which they live. Improperly managed, tourism destinations can degrade beaches and alter the natural environment on which turtles and other wildlife depend for survival. Thoughtful tourism development and management practices, however, can benefit marine life and bring a whole new level of enrichment to guests.

## Best Practices for Coastal Developers and Tourism Operators



Local residents help to release rehabilitated Kemp's Ridley sea turtles into Nantucket Sound off Cape Cod, U.S.A. PHOTO COURTESY OF NOAA.

### 1. Don't Build on the Beach.

Constructing at least 100 meters inland from the high tide line will protect sea turtles and built structures. Native vegetation and natural topography (such as dunes) stabilize the beach, reduce erosion, create suitable microclimates for nests, and help shield the beach from artificial light.

### 2. Adjust Lighting Schemes.

Lights near nesting beaches can disrupt nesting behavior and disorient hatchlings as they emerge from the nest, sometimes deterring them from their passage to the sea. Obey lighting ordinances, tint windows, provide window treatments, lower and shield sea-facing lights, and replace high-intensity light bulbs with lowest wattage, low-pressure, sodium vapor lighting where possible.

### 3. Keep Beaches Clear.

Obstacles can deter sea turtles

from the beach. Stack beach chairs and umbrellas at dusk, and remove litter; beach cleaning should be limited to hand tools that penetrate less than two inches into the sand.

4. **Secure the Trash.** Predators, including roaming dogs, are often attracted to trash. Keeping garbage cans securely covered will help keep them away and prevent trash from blowing onto the beach and into the sea.
5. **Prevent Pollution.** Modern sewage treatment methods and proper use of housekeeping, maintenance, and landscaping chemicals ensure a clean and healthy environment for sea turtles.
6. **Spread the Word.** Make your guests aware of your efforts. Provide materials to educate your guests about sea turtle conservation. Visit [www.widecast.org](http://www.widecast.org) and [www.SeaTurtleStatus.org](http://www.SeaTurtleStatus.org) for outreach tools.

The responsibility to protect sea turtles also belongs to tourists and residents in areas where sea turtles roam. You can do your part by following some simple guidelines.

## Turtle-Friendly Practices for Tourists and Residents

1. **Turn Out the Lights.** Turn off unnecessary lights, and close your drapes. Plug in nightlights when needed. When walking the beach, make minimal use of flashlights, and never shine light directly at turtles.
2. **Leave Nothing Behind.** Collect all items when leaving the beach. Litter can deter nesting females and is often mistaken for food.
3. **Say "No" to Turtle Products.** The sale of sea turtle parts and products—such as tortoiseshell trinkets and turtle leather—is generally illegal. Carrying these products across national borders is prohibited.
4. **Control Your Pets.** Animals, especially dogs, pose threats to eggs and hatchlings. Keep your pet on a leash at all times.
5. **Drive on the Road, Not on the Beach.** Even in permitted areas, driving on the beach can crush incubating eggs, and tire tracks on the sand trap hatchlings as they make their way from nest to sea.
6. **Stand Back.** Do not touch, harass, or flash-photograph sea turtles if you see them. Remain quiet, watch from a distance, and enjoy the opportunity to witness a living dinosaur in its natural environment.



Beach driving destroys the beach's natural topography and threatens sea turtles, sea birds, and other coastal life. © LUCY KEMP / MARINE PHOTOBANK

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