

Press Release
9 December 2021

COSTA RICA FIRST COUNTRY IN CONTINENTAL AMERICAS TO IMPLEMENT GREEN FINS ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

Helping the country to achieve the national biodiversity targets

[The Reef-World Foundation](#), the [National System of Conservation Areas](#) (SINAC) and [Misión Tiburón](#) are delighted to announce that Costa Rica has joined 13 other countries globally to implement the Green Fins initiative — a [UN Environment Programme](#) initiative. Costa Rica is the first country on the American continent to adopt Green Fins environmental standards to reduce the threats associated with diving and snorkelling on the marine environment.

Green Fins is implemented in Costa Rica by Misión Tiburón through the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) with support from Cynthia Barzuna Gutiérrez, Vice Minister of Water and Seas. Green Fins is being piloted in Guanacaste province, the North Pacific of Costa Rica, a major hub for scuba diving and snorkelling, as the first step in a national process. In North Pacific Costa Rica itself, there are around 50 sites with ideal conditions for snorkelling and recreational diving. Scuba diving tourism is a source of employment for many families in communities such as Playas del Coco, Brasilito or Tamarindo. Ensuring the sustainable use of these dive and snorkel sites is essential so that they continue to be a source of employment for current and future generations.

Over the last 10 years, the tourism industry in Costa Rica has seen a steady increase. The implementation of Green Fins in Costa Rica responds to the national and international goals set to reduce threats to biodiversity. One of its goals is to increase the number of marine tourism companies with sustainability certifications to promote a sustainable diving and snorkelling industry in the country. The adoption of Green Fins in the country also contributes directly to the Sustainable Development Goals 12 and 14, established by the United Nations and adopted by Costa Rica.

Following a week of training by Reef-World (9 to 14 November 2021), Costa Rica now has a national Green Fins team comprised of four fully certified Green Fins Assessors from Misión Tiburón and one Green Fins Coordinator from the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC). They will be responsible for recruiting, assessing, training and certifying dive and snorkel operators to become Green Fins members in the country. This involves providing training about the ecology and threats to coral reefs, simple and local everyday solutions to these threats and Green Fins' environmental standards to dive and snorkel operators. Green Fins membership will help marine tourism operators improve their sustainability and prove they are following environmental best practices as a way of attracting eco-minded tourists.

James Harvey, Director at The Reef-World Foundation, said: "Marine tourism in Costa Rica is growing fast with high demand from both national and international tourists coming to visit the incredible marine species that the country has to offer. Implementing best practices and guidelines through the Green Fins approach with support from the government of Costa Rica is critical to ensure that this market is sustainably managed, protecting valuable marine ecosystems for years to come. The national team of SINAC and Misión Tiburón have set out ambitious yet realistic targets to achieve a high level of uptake of Green Fins amongst dive and snorkel operators across the country. This will reduce local threats to the marine environment and increase corals and other marine life's resilience to wider global impacts, including climate change."

TO INSPIRE AND EMPOWER

Diving and snorkelling related damage to sensitive marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, is becoming an increasingly significant issue. This damage makes them less likely to survive other local and wider stressors, such as overfishing or plastic debris and the effects of climate change, such as rising sea temperatures. Based on robust individual assessments, the Green Fins initiative helps identify and mitigate these risks by providing environmental consultation and support to dive and snorkel operators. Through Green Fins implementation in Costa Rica, Reef-World aims to reduce negative environmental impacts in the region by reaching 14 marine tourism operators, training 70 dive guides and raising awareness of sustainability best practices among 14,000 tourists in the first year.

Ilena Zanella, Director of the Misión Tiburón, said: “The diving and snorkelling industry is an important ally to promote conservation practices on our marine and coastal ecosystems. Thanks to the industry’s natural involvement with these ecosystems, threats can be mitigated, and a more sustainable diving and snorkelling industry that follows Green Fins international standards can be established.”

Green Fins is a UN Environment Programme initiative, internationally coordinated by The Reef-World Foundation, which aims to protect and conserve coral reefs through environmentally friendly guidelines to promote a sustainable diving and snorkelling tourism industry. Green Fins provides the only internationally recognised environmental standards for the diving and snorkelling industry and has a robust assessment system to measure compliance. Reducing diving and snorkelling-related damage to sensitive marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, helps to make them more resilient to other stressors such as those associated with climate change.

The Green Fins approach includes proven assessment criteria to identify and mitigate high-risk practices above and below the water. Green Fins members are evaluated annually based on a 15-point code of conduct, which measures the company’s impact on coral reefs: of a possible score of 330, the lower the score, the lower its impact. The robust assessment then enables Green Fins Assessors to provide one-to-one consultation to help the business develop and implement best practice to improve the sustainability of the marine tourism industry.

The individual feedback from the assessments of the pioneering Green Fins members in Costa Rica and support provided includes practical, low-cost alternatives to common threats to the marine environment such as anchoring, provision of single-use plastics such as plastic bottles and lack of awareness of existing rules and regulations – is based on each company’s area of highest negative impact on the reef, as determined by the assessment.

To date, four Costa Rican dive operators have already joined the global network of 600+ trained and assessed Green Fins members. These are: Deep Blue Diving, Kraken Divers, El Refugio Guanacaste and Rich Coast Diving. There has also been significant interest from other operators who have signed the membership form and are looking forward to their training and assessment.

Mauricio Méndez, Technical Director of National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC), said: “Green Fins serve as an important tool for local diving communities to move towards a more sustainable use of their dive sites; so that they can maintain their scenic beauty and biological richness to provide livelihoods for many generations to come.”

TO INSPIRE AND EMPOWER

The launch of Green Fins Costa Rica was made possible thanks to financing support from [IDB Lab](#) under the [Beyond Tourism Challenge](#). The Beyond Tourism Innovation Challenge was run by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) through its innovation laboratory, IDB Lab, and in collaboration with the [United Nations World Tourism Organization](#) (UNWTO).

For more information, please visit www.reef-world.org, www.greenfins.net/countries/costarica or www.misiontiburon.org. Dive and snorkel operators interested in signing up to Green Fins can find the membership application form at: www.greenfins.net/how-to-join.

Costa Rican dive and snorkel operators interested in signing up to be Green Fins members can contact the Green Fins Team at Misión Tiburón (costarica@greenfins.net).

- Ends -

For more information, images or an interview with a spokesperson from The Reef-World Foundation, please contact:

Teresa Moh

press@reef-world.org

+60 16 4077 905 (WhatsApp)

About Reef-World

The Reef-World Foundation is a registered UK charity which delivers practical solutions for marine conservation around the world. The charity promotes the wise use of natural resources - particularly coral reefs and related ecosystems - for the benefit of local communities, visitors and future generations. It is dedicated to supporting, inspiring and empowering governments, businesses, communities and individuals around the world to act in conserving and sustainably developing coastal resources.

Reef-World leads the global implementation of the UN Environment's Green Fins initiative, which focuses on driving environmentally friendly scuba diving and snorkelling practices across the industry globally. As such, the charity provides low cost and practical solutions to local and industry-wide environmental challenges associated with the marine tourism industry. It provides education and capacity building assistance to empower environmental champions (within the diving industry, local communities, authorities and governments) to implement proven coastal resource management approaches.

Please visit www.reef-world.org to learn more or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

About Green Fins

Green Fins is a proven conservation management approach – spearheaded by The Reef-World Foundation in partnership with the UN Environment – which leads to a measurable reduction in the negative environmental impacts associated with the marine tourism industry. The initiative aims to protect and conserve coral reefs through environmentally friendly guidelines that promote a sustainable diving and snorkelling tourism industry. It provides the only internationally recognised environmental standards for the diving and snorkelling industry and has a robust assessment system to measure compliance.

TO INSPIRE AND EMPOWER

Green Fins encourages and empowers members of the diving industry to act to reduce the pressures on coral reefs by offering dive and snorkel companies practical, low-cost alternatives to harmful practices - such as anchoring, fish feeding and chemical pollution – as well as providing strategic training, support and resources. By reducing the local direct and indirect pressures tourism puts on coral reefs, it helps make corals healthier and more resilient to other stresses such as the effects of climate change. Look for the Green Fins logo when booking your next dive trip.

Please visit www.greenfins.net to learn more or follow the initiative on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

About Misión Tiburón

Misión Tiburón is an organisation founded by Ilena Zanella and Andrés López, who have deep passion and love for the ocean and its inhabitants. Misión Tiburón is dedicated to the ocean, utilizing years of experience, knowledge and research to help create a safe environment for both humans and some of the ocean's most critically endangered inhabitants. The organisation is on a mission to protect and conserve the ocean and restore it to where it can thrive again through education and scientific research. www.misiontiburon.org

About SINAC

The National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) is an agency of the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINA E - Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía). SINAC has instrumental legal authority and exercises its functions as a management and institutional coordination, decentralized and participatory, integrating skills in forestry, wildlife, protected areas and the protection and conservation of the use of river basins and water systems in order to dictate policy, plan and implement processes aimed at achieving sustainability in the management of natural resources.

SINAC is a concept of integral conservation, which offers the possibility of developing responsible governance, involving the State, civil society, private enterprise, and every individual of the country concerned and committed to building a healthy environment and ecologically balanced. www.sinac.go.cr

About the IDB

The Inter-American Development Bank is devoted to improving lives. Established in 1959, the IDB is a leading source of long-term financing for economic, social and institutional development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The IDB also conducts cutting-edge research and provides policy advice, technical assistance and training to public and private sector clients throughout the region.

About IDB Lab

IDB Lab is the innovation laboratory of the IDB Group, the leading source of development finance and know-how for improving lives in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The purpose of IDB Lab is to drive innovation for inclusion in the region, by mobilizing financing, knowledge, and connections to co-create solutions capable of transforming the lives of vulnerable populations affected by economic, social or environmental factors. www.idblab.org

About the UNWTO

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the specialized agency of the United Nations fostering tourism as a vehicle for equal, inclusive and sustainable development. Working with Member States, international organizations and the private sector, UNWTO promotes safe and seamless travel for all. UNWTO also works to ensure tourism is at the forefront of global efforts to

TO INSPIRE AND EMPOWER

achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through its ability to create decent jobs, promote equality and preserve natural and cultural heritage. www.unwto.org

TO INSPIRE AND EMPOWER
