The age of extinction Global development

Sand groomers v turtles: how wildlife is falling foul of the demand for Insta-perfect beaches

From the turtle-nesting beaches of Italy to Greek island bird havens, across the Mediterranean campaigners are fighting to protect habitats from tourists seeking a picture-perfect holiday

In the summer months in Puglia, southern Italy, the battle for the beaches begins before dawn. As the sun rises, tourists flood the coastline, often unaware of what lies hidden beneath their feet.

Some beach owners, such as Damiano Reale at Vivosa Apulia resort in Marina di Ugento, on the Ionian coast, are taking steps to protect sea turtle nests on their properties. Every morning, Reale and his team check if any eggs have been laid, and avoid using tractors and strong lights at night, which could disorient the turtles. If nests are found, they fence them off and monitor them 24/7 when it's time for the hatchlings to emerge.

"It is important to make tourists, politicians and researchers understand that a smart balance between commercial use of a beach and appreciation - whether of its history or its natural events - is absolutely possible," says Reale.