

TRAVEL BETTER BEST PRACTICES



Guiding Travelers
Towards Sustainable,
Responsible Travel



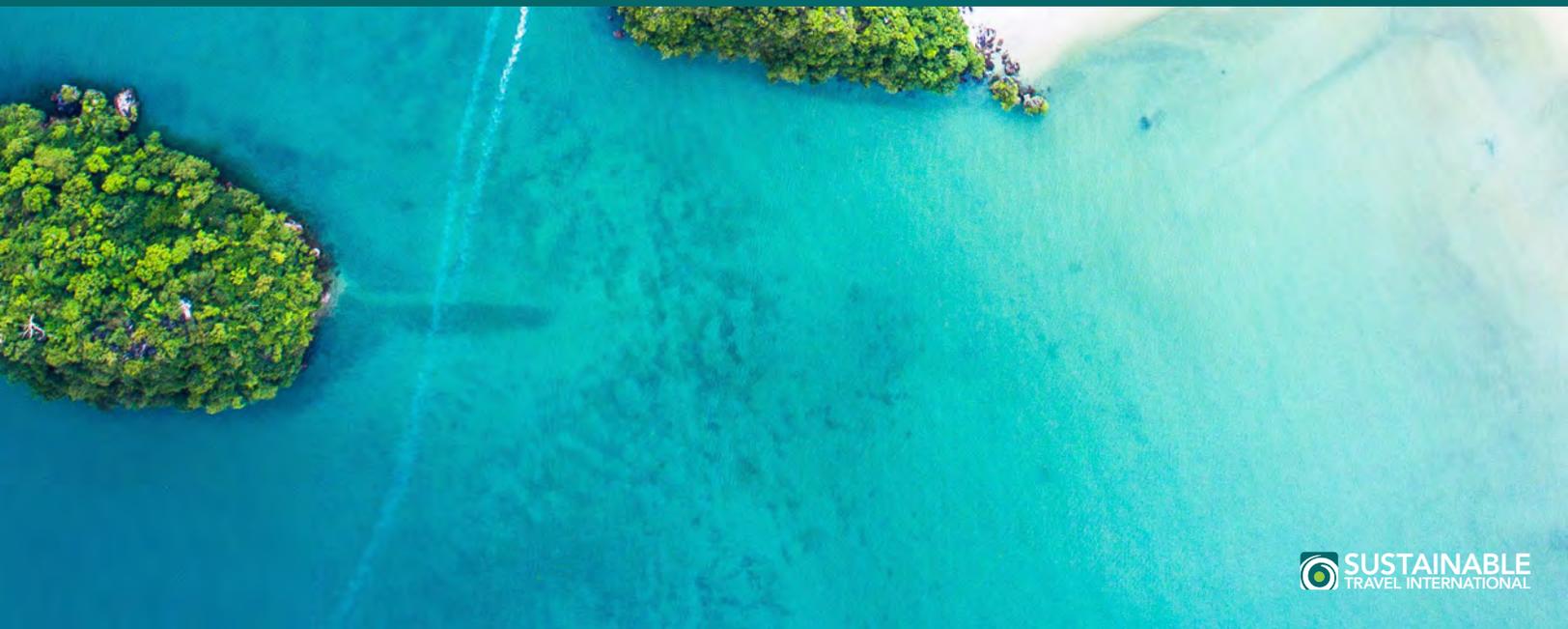


Exploring a new place has the power to change your life, but you can also change that place and the lives of the people who live there - for better or worse.

Travel and tourism is the largest, most diverse global industry. Employing 1 in 10 people on the planet, the industry touches an incredible number of places, lives, and communities in all corners of the globe. Because of its extensive reach, tourism can be a powerful tool to drive environmental and social change.

Unfortunately, tourism doesn't always leave behind a positive impact. During your travels, you've likely witnessed the consequences that tourism can have on nature, people, and cultures. While your individual impact may seem trivial, when you consider that over 1.2 billion people travel each year, the combined effects can be substantial. From dying coral reefs and air pollution to income inequality and culture loss, our trips have the potential to cause irreversible damage.

Fortunately, there are ways that travelers can take action. By making informed travel decisions you can lessen your personal footprint, while also helping to combat some of the world's most pressing issues. This guide includes some simple tips that will help you start making a difference today.



Respecting & Preserving Cultures



Our world is a wealth of diverse knowledge and rich traditions. Tourism is an unparalleled opportunity to learn about and celebrate other cultures. As a traveler, your actions can play an important role in preserving these remarkable cultures. However, a lack of traveler awareness and respect can also lead to harmful impacts such as cultural homogenization, community hostility, and degraded heritage sites.

- **Observe local standards of dress.** Be aware of cultural norms and present yourself so as not to offend anyone. Take a cue from what the locals wear and as a general guideline, dress modestly, especially at any religious sites.
- **Be aware of body language.** Many gestures have different meanings in other cultures – sometimes offensive, sometimes not. To avoid awkward encounters, learn about any cultural sensitivities before you depart.
- **Respect and celebrate traditions.** Every region has its own unique cultural traditions. Always show respect and if you feel comfortable doing so, participate in authentic cultural experiences. This can encourage cultural preservation and help protect traditional knowledge from being lost.
- **Speak the language.** Make an effort to learn and use some of the local language. At a bare minimum, memorize a few key words and phrases such as ‘hello,’ ‘goodbye,’ ‘please,’ ‘thank you,’ and ‘do you speak English?’
- **Follow local food etiquette.** From the utensils you use to who pays, what constitutes as good table manners varies widely between cultures. Before going abroad, learn about the dining do’s and don’ts specific to your destination.
- **Behave appropriately at cultural sites.** Understand the significance of the places you visit. Be particularly conscientious to engage in respectful behavior at sacred or religious sites. Keep in mind that some tourist attractions are somber memorials - these are places to pay respect, not snap lighthearted selfies.
- **Minimize your physical impact at heritage sites.** Many popular heritage sites are deteriorating as a result of overtourism. Reduce strain on infrastructure by visiting at off-peak times, following visitor guidelines, and not touching artifacts.

Supporting Local People



Tourism has powerful potential to improve local well-being, create opportunities for underserved communities, and support sustainable development. However, this isn't always the case, as tourism can also contribute to economic leakage or human rights violations. As a traveler, you can take steps to ensure that your money ends up in the hands of local people and benefits host communities in the places you visit.

- **Support businesses that employ locals.** To ensure your travel dollars stay in the local economy, choose businesses that are locally-owned or managed and hire local staff.
- **Bargain respectfully.** Although bargaining is expected in many cultures, don't pinch pennies when negotiating. Pennies to you may mean as much as an entire family's meal. Pay a fair price that makes both you and the seller happy.
- **Eat locally.** Dine at restaurants that use local ingredients. Or, visit the local market. Not only will you get to purchase fresh produce, you'll be supporting the local farmers who grow it.
- **Buy locally made handicrafts.** Buy local, rather than imported products and purchase souvenirs crafted by local artisans. The money you spend on local artists also encourages the preservation of their cultural heritage.
- **Ask companies how they give back.** Look for businesses that support skills development for residents or invest in community development.
- **Treat locals with respect and dignity.** Keep in mind that the place you are visiting is someone's home and that the people who live there are not tourism objects. Respect your surroundings, avoid staring, and don't be condescending in your interactions. Don't assume that people are okay with you taking their picture - always ask before snapping a photo.
- **Follow through on your bookings.** Remember that your leisure activities are someone else's livelihood. If you cancel last minute, you could be throwing off their entire day's earnings.
- **Stay informed.** Research the human welfare issues in the destination you are visiting. Understanding the problems will help you make more informed travel decisions.
- **Report child sex tourism.** Child sex tourism is a sad and unfortunate reality within the travel industry. To help prevent it, do not participate in the practice and report any incidents you witness to [a child protection hotline](#), a local organization, or the police.

Conserving Natural Environments

Since tourism tends to flourish in biodiversity hotspots, it has the unique potential to spur environmental responsibility and support conservation efforts in some of the world's most vulnerable destinations. However, if travelers do not take care to protect their natural surroundings, their actions can cause lasting harm to fragile land and marine ecosystems and diminish our planet's limited natural resources.

- **Do your research.** Be aware of the sustainability issues affecting the natural environments you are visiting and use this knowledge to guide your decision-making.
- **Visit protected areas.** The fees you pay to use these areas support local efforts to conserve them. Plus, responsible visitation to sensitive ecosystems can initiate support for protecting new areas.
- **Obey all rules and regulations.** These are present for the protection of the environment, wildlife, local communities, and you.
- **Hire local guides.** If a nature excursion is on your itinerary, go with a guide that is knowledgeable about the local environment. In addition to gaining a better understanding of what you see, you will also be incentivizing local communities to invest in environmental conservation.
- **Leave no trace.** Stay on trails in natural areas and avoid causing damage to the surrounding environment. Remember to "leave nothing but footprints."
- **Choose businesses that walk the 'eco-friendly' talk.** Realize that just because a business claims to be 'green' doesn't mean they necessarily are. Before booking, ask the company how they're minimizing their environmental impact and supporting local conservation efforts.
- **Look for certifications.** You can also look for businesses that are certified by credible, third-party organizations. However, keep in mind that just because a business isn't certified doesn't mean they aren't an environmentally friendly option.
- **Conserve natural resources.** Tourists tend to consume far more than locals, and many destinations struggle with limited natural resources. In addition to supporting companies that have resource conservation policies in place, take extra care to reduce your own water and energy use.

Minimizing Waste & Pollution



The earth's resources are precious. Yet, we continue to overuse these very resources that we depend on, creating excess waste and pollution. Tourism tends to exacerbate these issues, particularly in small islands and developing destinations which often lack sufficient waste management infrastructure and are highly vulnerable to climate change. As a traveler, there are ways you can take action and lessen your personal impact.

- **Avoid disposable plastic products.** The best way to prevent waste problems is by reducing your consumption to begin with! This is particularly important in destinations that lack recycling programs. For instance, make a habit of requesting no straws; bring along a reusable water bottle and purifier to filter your own water; and refuse plastic shopping bags.
- **Understand local waste management capabilities.** Learn about the waste management in the destination. Dispose of waste properly and recycle when possible.
- **Don't litter.** Pack out everything you brought in and dispose of waste properly to leave places just as you found them. Some destinations even organize cleanup events that travelers can participate in.
- **Pack smart.** Make it easier on your destination's waste infrastructure by carefully choosing the items you carry in. For example, try not to bring items made of Styrofoam, remove extra packaging before packing, and use refillable toiletry bottles.
- **Fly less.** The large majority of carbon emissions caused by tourism are due to air travel. When possible, take a bus or train to your destination. Or consider staying closer to home and exploring your own backyard!
- **Fly smart.** If you must travel by plane, take steps to reduce your emissions - choose the most direct route, fly coach/economy, and pack your bags as light as possible.
- **Offset your emissions.** Balance out your emissions by purchasing carbon offsets that support energy and forestry projects around the world. Some tour operators or airlines have their own offset programs for travelers. If not, you can purchase offsets using Sustainable Travel International's [online carbon calculator](#).
- **Choose more efficient transportation options to get around your destination.** Instead of renting a car, opt for public transportation. Or for a more active experience, spend the day exploring by bicycle or on your own two feet. If you do need a car, try to rent a biodiesel or hybrid-electric, or a small, fuel-efficient model.

Protecting Wildlife



Witnessing the different animal species that roam our planet can be one of the most fascinating and memorable travel experiences. While many tourists are well-meaning animal lovers, a lack of awareness or the lure of an exotic selfie can result in tourists unintentionally harming the very animals they care about. As wildlife experiences become more popular, it is important to plan trips that prioritize animal welfare.

- **Keep wildlife wild.** Do not touch, disturb, or feed land or marine wildlife. This can alter their natural behavior and have detrimental effects on their ability to survive. Ideally, the animals should never know you were watching them.
- **Be a responsible photographer.** If you choose to take pictures, do so from a distance and refuse to take photos with animals that are drugged or restrained.
- **Choose ethical experiences.** Do not support tours or attractions that cause suffering to animals or allow travelers to interact with animals in exploitative ways. Research their reputation online and be upfront about your desire to travel responsibly. Steer clear of common culprits such as elephant rides, lion petting, tiger selfies, and dancing monkeys.
- **Think twice before visiting animals in captivity.** Only visit attractions that do not capture animals from the wild and provide adequate living conditions and veterinary care.
- **Use reef-safe sunscreen.** Many chemicals in sunscreens can cause coral bleaching. Read the labels and avoid products containing oxybenzone, butylparaben, octinoxate or 4-methylbenzylidene camphor.
- **Be aware of what you're eating.** Find out what species are endangered or threatened and make sure that they don't end up on your plate. If demand falls, then the number of endangered animals killed for food will fall, too.
- **Make sustainable seafood choices.** To help global fish populations survive, make your seafood choices based on species, distance the seafood has traveled, and fishing method used. For more information, check out [Seafood Watch](#) or [WWF's seafood guides](#).
- **Buy responsible souvenirs.** When purchasing souvenirs, avoid items made from animals such as turtle shell, ivory, or coral products.

Giving Back



She-Explores / Torres del Paine Legacy Fund

You can make a positive impact by giving back to the communities and places you visit, while you're on the road or even after you're back home. Though well-intentioned, travelers can end up doing more harm than good when trying to give back to the communities they visit. There are a few things to keep in mind to ensure that your contribution is in fact making a positive difference.

- **Seek out only reputable volunteer experiences.** Research all volunteer opportunities to make sure they are ethical and that you won't be displacing jobs needed by locals. Long-term commitments by skilled volunteers are more likely to make an impact than short-term trips which tend to be primarily for the tourist's own benefit.
- **Do not volunteer at orphanages.** These institutions are often money-making ploys and the children who live there are not actually orphans. Volunteering at orphanages feeds the demand for orphans and can perpetuate this harmful cycle.
- **Put your scientist hat on.** Citizen science programs allow travelers to support scientific research by collecting data in the places you visit. There are citizen science programs all over the world and covering whole range of topics from spotting birds to counting trash.
- **Discourage begging.** It is not advisable to give money or candies to beggars. This can foster dependency and lead to more begging.

Instead, opt to support a local organization that addresses the cause through youth training or employment programs.

- **Donate supplies that are truly needed.** If you wish to bring gifts to your destination, do so in the most impactful way. When possible, purchase goods locally, and only bring items that have been specifically requested by local organizations. To browse destination-specific supply lists, visit packforapurpose.org.
- **Support travel philanthropy funds and local nonprofits.** By funding local destination stewardship projects, travel philanthropy funds allow you to support the people and places you care about. If there is not a fund in your destination, identify other local community development or environmental conservation organizations that you can give back to.
- **Support sustainable tourism.** Help out on a more global scale by supporting an NGO, such as Sustainable Travel International, that focuses on using tourism to advance conservation and combat human welfare issues.

Becoming a responsible traveler is an ongoing journey.

While the practices outlined in this guide are a good starting point, it is important to continue doing your research to stay informed and learn how you can help. One resource that you can check out right away is Sustainable Travel International's Travel Better Club. It's an online community where travelers like you can exchange experiences, access sustainable travel tips, and complete an online training course. To join, visit travelbetterclub.org and enter the coupon code iTravelBetter to waive the membership fee.

Along the way, be sure to multiply your impact by sharing your newfound knowledge with other travelers and remember that even just asking questions can have a positive effect. You as an individual can aid other travelers in decision-making and contribute to the long term success of responsible businesses simply by providing feedback, posting on social media, and writing honest online reviews.



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TRAVEL INTERNATIONAL**

SustainableTravel.org