



Responsible Tourism

Procedures and methods in place to encourage the practice of responsible tourism within the STC

Introduction

The STC truly believe that travel and tourism has the potential to bring positive outcomes to the communities, cultures and environments we visit. That is why responsible and sustainable tourism is one of the key values of our business.

We strive to connect our clients with the people they meet, nurture the cultures they experience and protect the beautiful environments they are lucky enough to explore. And thanks to our shared views and approach to business and travel we believe that we have the tools to achieve these dreams.

Our Impact on People

We are committed to everyone involved in our work from teachers to students to the local crafts women and camp cooks, they all have the right to be treated equally and fairly. We will not discriminate on the grounds of sex, colour, religion, ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, nationality or marital status.

Staff and Suppliers

One of the STC's core principles is to use local leaders from the destination, rather than send a leader from the UK. We believe this enhances the travel experience for our clients by offering a safer and more immersive approach, whilst also benefitting the local community, providing employment and training and encouraging young people to work in the area, preventing rural to urban migration.

Both in country and in the UK, the STC supports fair pay and employment practices. This includes our third-party suppliers and ad hoc people involved such as tuk tuk drivers.

As far as possible, we seek to develop long term relationships with our overseas partners and suppliers to encourage their economic growth and also allow us to invest in and provide training and development in their sector.

We will provide ongoing training with regards to the principles and practices of sustainable and responsible travel and seek to involve both our direct and indirect staff as well as influencing the practices of our suppliers.

The STC aims to use local service providers such as hotels, activity organisers, restaurants and vehicles in order to spread the economic benefit. These providers, where possible, have accreditation such as Travelife Partnership or Certification, ensuring their attitude to responsible and sustainable travel is in line with our ethos.

Local Leaders

We believe passionately in our local leaders; not only do they have an unrivalled enthusiasm for showing off their homeland, but it also means they are the most informed on local issues, trekking and escape routes and of course the language! This allows participants to gain so much more from their trip while also increasing their safety overseas.

Plus, the use of local leaders directly benefits the local economy by employing local people and inspiring the next generation to look at alternatives to heading to big cities for work which often leads to rural degeneration. Our local leaders also benefit the economy in other areas from guiding you to the best restaurants, to advising on which craftsmen to purchase souvenirs from. They can also give assistance on the fair price to pay and generally ensure that while trekking, our groups are making the least possible impact on the areas they visit.

Let's go Local

Without wishing to repeat ourselves we aim to make everything local. As far as possible we strive to use local suppliers, restaurants, staff, accommodation and transport. This positively impacts local economies whilst also allowing us the opportunity to help develop their businesses for the future by helping them adhere to our strict safety policies in place. By encouraging high standards, we are raising the bar while also ensuring new staff are trained.

One of our favourite examples is Sindyanna Galilee, whom we often visit during our trips to Israel and Palestine. A not-for-profit, female-led, fair-trade 'business for peace'. This NGO sells Arab producers' olive oil, honey, almonds and soaps on the international marketplace before channelling all profits back into education for Arab women, bridging cultural divides and encouraging sustainable agriculture and supporting organic farming. The organisation is run by both Arab and Israeli women who share a vision of peaceful co-existence.

Training and Development

In order to make travel sustainable we must be sure that those involved in the industry have the correct knowledge to work safely and responsibly. We work hard to be sure that everyone involved meets our due diligence checks and receives the training they require. This raises the bar in the industry and encourages more to follow suit and train their new employees to meet these standards too, all benefiting the local economy and helping to prevent rural degeneration. All of our local leaders undergo training with us so that we can ensure the high-quality staff we desire but to also enhance their careers and options in life.

Many of our schemes also encourage the training of local people to allow them to earn a living for themselves and gain valuable skills. This might be through supporting female guides in areas where women are often kept at home, or working with local NGOs and cooperatives where locals can gain valuable skills and build an economy for themselves.

The STC are working towards achieving the International Standards Organisation (ISO) standards for adventure activity travel with our suppliers. This will help raise our standards for all adventure activities on our trips even higher.

Local People and Communities

The STC will work to prevent the exploitation of children in tourism.

We will always respect the cultures, customs and religions of our destinations and try not to influence them unless absolutely necessary. Moreover, we will work to educate our participants and encourage them to act in a respectful manner.

When creating our itineraries or researching new destinations for our trips, we will always consider the economic, environmental and cultural issues which may arise.

The STC actively discourages participation in project work which involves working with children or orphanages. Furthermore, we seek to promote only project or volunteer work which we believe brings real and long-term benefits to the local community and has minimal negative impact on the local people and environment.

We will provide support to organisations and local communities visited by our groups, especially where project work is concerned to ensure the longevity of the outcome.

While designing our tours, we seek to balance the needs of larger groups to ensure that our type and scale of tourism is appropriate to local conditions and infrastructure.

Working with animals

Animal abuse can take place in rather unexpected circumstances. Innocent tourist attractions such as donkey rides, horse & carriage rides or a camel trip can camouflage serious maltreatment of animals. This may be in the form of overloading, or extremely long working days with no water and high temperatures. We do not believe in supporting such activities and clients should be aware of the issues, circumstances, the appearance of the animals and the conditions in which animals may work.

In any situation where the public interacts with captive animals, either directly or indirectly, high standards of animal welfare should be paramount. Animals have specific needs, regardless of their situation. Whilst there are many examples of good practice, some captive wild animals suffer poor animal welfare standards, and as such may suffer for the benefit of the visiting public. Moreover,

visitors can be at risk from animal attacks in situations where a supplier allows close contact to occur between tourists and wildlife.

The STC has strict working animal policies and ensures that where animals are provided for support on trips, thorough checks are conducted on the provider for animal welfare.

A good source for advice is Brooke Hospital for Animals <https://www.thebrooke.org/>

The STC ensures that no performing animal farms or shows are visited on their trips, only regulated sanctuaries that have an active involvement with rehabilitation and education of welfare with animals

Clients

Prior to any trip overseas, we will host an information evening for our participants to give them an insight into and understanding of the people and destination which they will be visiting so that they may gain as much as possible from their visit and act in a respectful and responsible way. We will also provide a Responsible Travel information guide.

Our local leaders will act to assist our clients in acting responsibly while away and encourage them to do so.

We also understand that any overseas visit can be overwhelming for some of our clients and we work hard to ensure that they feel safe and comfortable while travelling with us.



RESPONSIBLE
TRAVEL

Our Impact on the Environment

The STC aims to achieve a zero-litter policy everywhere we go and to provide support and training for our local teams to facilitate this.

Through our local leaders, we seek to encourage our clients to consider the environmental impact of their actions whilst they are abroad in order to help protect the natural environment. We actively discourage the participation of activities which exploit wild or domestic animals or activities which may harm the natural habitats of wild animals and encourage our clients to support our carbon offsetting scheme.

Clients are given information regarding and encouraged to use environmentally friendly articles including clothing, containers and biodegradable washing products.

Our local leaders are knowledgeable in the intricate issues surrounding their local environments and as such will provide instruction and advice for our clients as to the best way to look after it.

Where possible, the STC encourages all suppliers to seek environmentally appropriate options when running trips, including accommodation and transport and seeks options which will have a minimal effect on the local environment while also promoting their positive impact.

Responsible water consumption and waste management

The use of disposable plastic bottles while traveling is hard on the environment, hard on the communities left with the garbage, is expensive and it can often be unhealthy. No traveller wants to leave a trail of plastic water bottles behind them, but many don't know how to avoid it.

The STC advises all participants when travelling to use responsible methods of obtaining clean drinking water. Advice is given in line with 'Travelers Against Plastic' policies and this is also enforced with induction and training with local suppliers. The STC does not condone the use of single use plastic bottles.

Our providers are briefed regarding the use of environmentally responsible methods of water and waste management. No single use bottled water is provided on STC trips, all clients are briefed on the use of self-purification methods of water and/or clean drinking water is provided in locations where it can be purified.

Waste management is advised where single use meal containers are avoided such as disposable polystyrene trays and plastic cutlery. If cutlery and meal containers are not provided, clients are advised to bring multi use containers such as metal mess tins or multi use plastic bowls.

What does this mean? What are we actually doing about it?

Here are our policies on the inclusion of arrangements on our itineraries:

Accommodation

When selecting accommodation for STC trips, ground agents should seek properties and accommodations which adhere to the STC accommodation guidelines for sustainability.

These guidelines are as follows:

- The accommodation is actively engaged in aiming to reduce energy and water consumption.
- The accommodation actively seeks to reduce the volume of solid waste produced.
- All waste water is treated to meet national regulatory standards.
- All employees are protected with relation to national laws and their employment complies with local employment legislation.
- The accommodation implements measures to ensure that children are protected from exploitation and potential forms of abuse.
- Should, at any point, the STC feel that suppliers do not meet the required level of adherence to the above, the STC retains the right to cancel the contract without notice.

Transport

Due to safety and itinerary issues the STC requires the use of privately booked vehicles on itineraries, where possible public transport on trains and ferries are used.

- Any vehicles used for STC itineraries should be able to transport the groups safely and efficiently, our standard operating procedures will implement this.
- All vehicles should not overbear on capacity i.e. not using a 50-seat coach for 20 participants.
- Vehicles should have regular maintenance checks and annual services to ensure roadworthiness and keep emissions as low as possible.
- Vehicles are used appropriate to their environment, 4 wheeled drive for off road. Reducing excess damage to the environment.

Overnight transport

For child protection issues the STC requires cabins to be booked for overnight transport such as sleeper trains. All cabins should be filled to capacity before using any other cabin.

Waste Management

All in country teams are trained to respect the environment and are aware of the effects of waste management. Teams are briefed to reduce excess waste with food consumption and also to responsibly recycle or dispose of any other waste.

Souvenirs, purchases and tipping

The STC advises all groups that travel about current living wages and rates. As a western culture travelling to a potentially developing country our participants may believe that they can drive a hard bargain when purchasing souvenirs, this may be the culture in the destination. Advice is also given on the types of illegal souvenirs to look out for and not to purchase such as Ivory, corals and shells.

With this in mind the participants are advised on up to date costs of living in their destination ensuring the traders can earn a reasonable living.

Current tipping advice is given prior to departure, ensuring that those that require a tip are receiving a tip for their services in line with current trends.

Choosing Volunteer Work and Projects

We appreciate that volunteer projects can enhance a journey abroad and believe that they have the potential to be worthwhile and life-enhancing for both the participants and the local community they choose to work with. When our suppliers propose volunteering opportunities, we investigate the real worth of the project and will only approve it if we believe it will be beneficial and worthwhile to the community involved.

We aim to work at the grass roots level in conjunction with the community, NGOs and conservation organisations to achieve this.

The STC does not support any volunteering activity involving the care of children or exploitation of animals and we only encourage participation in activities which our clients are qualified to do.

When consorting with our suppliers we focus on the following points to assess a project:

- Does the project add value to the community or impose on the community? If it adds value, then how?
- What sort of local consultation went into developing the project?
- Is there a local organisation involved in the day-to-day management of it?
- What is/are the timeframes of the project (there should be both short and long-term goals)?
- What local employment is being created as part of the project?
- How is the money paid being spent?
- Is the project provider a responsible travel organisation?

Initiatives and Schemes

Within the STC, we run various initiatives and are part of several schemes which help us to act more responsibly within the industry and demonstrate our commitment to this cause.

Zero Litter Policy

In many of the destinations our groups travel to litter is an overwhelming problem. Throughout our tours we have a zero-tolerance approach to litter and seek to minimise the amount we produce. This is done through the work of our in-country leaders whilst we support them in effectively disposing of any waste which is produced. With our in-country operators, we actively encourage groups to participate in activities such as litter clean-up projects.

Carbon Offsetting (<http://www.foc-uk.com/>)

Carbon emissions produced by flights have a huge impact on the environment. In order to minimise this, we include the cost of carbon offsetting all international flights within our quotes with the proceeds going to **Friends of Conservation**, a charity that invests in Carbon mitigation schemes such as solar power cookers and reforestation programmes. We also pay to carbon offset all international staff flights.



Industry Wide Groups and Accreditation

As part of our commitment to responsible travel we are part of several organisations which promote responsibility and sustainability in tourism. These are:

Travelife (www.travelife.org)

A certification system dedicated to making travel more responsible and sustainable with whom we are working to develop our business in this area.



Tourism Concern (<https://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/>)

Tourism Concern works for ethical and fairly traded tourism wherever they can make a difference – campaigning, informing and supporting. Ensuring that travel is ethical, fair and a positive experience for both travellers and the people and places they visit.



Child Safe (<http://thinkchildsafe.org/>)

Child Safe movement has been developed to reduce the negative impact on children in tourism around the globe. STC works alongside the Child Safe movement in developing child friendly itineraries.



Travellers Against Plastic (<http://www.travelersagainstplastic.org/>)

TAP Campaign is an outreach initiative which aims to educate global travellers about the harmful impacts of plastic water bottles usage and encourage travellers to be prepared to clean their own drinking water. The STC have taken the company pledge with travellers against plastic to show our support for this scheme.



World Animal Protection (<https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.uk/>)

The STC have taken the corporate pledge to World Animal Protection to ensure that any animals included within an itinerary, whether sanctuaries, whale watching tours or working animals on trekking routes have the highest standards of welfare.

