

The STC's

Little Book of Responsible Travel



A handy guide full of simple steps you can take to reduce your environmental and cultural impact while travelling overseas

Welcome to the Little Book of Responsible Travel. This may just be a small guide to keep in your pocket but the issue of responsible tourism is a big one. Badly managed travel and tourism can lead to the destruction of habitats, local resources and communities as a whole.

Here at the STC we believe that tourism has the potential to cause a minimal negative effect while also being highly beneficial for all concerned. We believe that we have a duty to preserve the areas and cultures that our groups visit and as such make every effort we can to arrange holidays, tours and expeditions which will have a minimal impact. On tour, our in country leaders play a vital role in this and many are recognised as leaders in the field of responsible tourism.

However, it is not just down to us and them, responsible travel and tourism is also dependent on *you*. There are many things that you as a traveller can do to minimise the bad and maximise the good when you travel.

This guide gives a few basic tips and suggestions on how to travel responsibly. Whether you will be joining us on your next adventure or not we hope that you will join with us in making tourism and industry which really benefits the world. Keep an eye out for ways that you can *think outside the box*, useful *examples* and a few *moral dilemmas* surrounding responsible tourism.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to check out our website or get in touch.

Happy travels!

So What is Responsible Tourism?

Responsible tourism is tourism which minimises negative social, economic and environmental impacts. It makes an effort to cause greater economic benefits and enhances the well-being of host communities.

That is a bit of a mouthful but in essence, responsible tourism is tourism which does good to the local destination. Think back to your last package holiday, amongst the hotel pool, free cocktails and endless buffets did any money or employment go to the local people? And was the business itself run in an environmentally friendly manner? We imagine not.

What do we do?

We at the STC are pretty proud of the efforts we make in this field. Through our in country guides we have the ability to encourage economic benefit and employment in our destinations. We design specialist Girls' School programmes in which we aim to really build connections with local women and bring positive impacts to both parties involved. We support local businesses and enterprises by visiting and learning about them especially on our business and economics trips. We support, teach, encourage and generally won't stop talking about the importance of protecting and preserving the environment and resources when we travel: from being sparse with water to disposing of waste effectively while trekking to our 50:50 carbon offsetting scheme. And that is just the start of it, check out our website for more information.

Before you Book

The first stage of any trip is organising it and even at this stage there are steps you can take to travel responsibly. As we have said (many times) we are highly committed to this but should be traveling with someone else there are some questions you should ask yourself before you commit to booking:

- Does your operator invest in your destination by employing and training local people?
- If trekking, does your operator support porter protection?
- Does your operator support locally owned businesses in order to bring money to the local economy?
- What are their environmental practices and do these really help?



- If volunteering, has the programme been designed and developed with the local community with a long term vision and benefits?

These are just some of the things you should consider before agreeing to travel with any operator and any good tour operator will have policies and procedures in place to ensure that the outcomes to all of these questions are positive.

Before you Go

Now a lot of talk about responsible tourism revolves around what you can do once you are on holiday but don't forget there are things you can do at home too!

Do your research This exciting new country you are arriving into is home to its own history, wildlife, people, culture, food, language – the list goes on! While you will never be able to learn everything you should make an effort to learn as much as you can. A few words in the local language will go a long way in making locals happy and also enhance your trip to another level. Make yourself aware of customs, traditions and laws. Being unaware of these could cause offence or result in you getting into some serious trouble. Remember, small things such as holding your partners hand could be seen as very abnormal in some cultures, imagine how upset you would be if a tourist to the UK skipped one of our neat and orderly queues!

Start at home Unplug anything you will not need while you are away and leave behind any excess packaging, recycling in the UK is probably a lot better than wherever you are going particularly if it is somewhere remote.

Flights Where possible, avoid layovers and travel by the most direct route in order to reduce your carbon emissions. And why not also consider carbon offsetting those emissions?

The People

It is easy to be amazed by how other people live, even in your own country. It is also easy to forget that the incredible faces you are staring at are real people and that this destination you are just visiting is their home.

Think outside the box!

Have you ever considered buying local clothing styles? You might not be brave enough for a sari in India but why not try a kurta/Svalbard combo (traditional female clothing consisting for baggy trousers and a long top), you could even get some handmade, bringing money to the local economy!

Just as you would like visitors to act politely and respectfully in your home you should do so in theirs. Once more, researching before you travel will impact hugely on this and allow you to fit in and interact better with local people.

Consider things such as normal **dress codes** and if in doubt **dress conservatively**. Small acts such as removing your shoes before you enter someone's home or a religious building can be very important.

Be aware that the local culture will be different to your own. You may find this difficult for example in places where only men are allowed due to cultural reasons but it would be highly disrespectful to argue against this.

Bring a smile and be polite just like your Mum taught you! It is amazing how much a smile and basic manners will cheer people up and help you to interact with local people. It costs nothing and makes a huge difference. Remember to **always ask before taking photographs of people** and respect a person's right to decline, do you like having your photo taken by complete strangers? Remember to **actually engage with people**, locals are not a show for you to enjoy! They are real people trying to get on with their lives, really engaging with them will allow a better connection and enhance the experience for both parties.



Be Ethical

Ethics are a difficult thing and by nature there is often no right or wrong answer. That is why we can't just hand you a to do list on being a responsible traveller. Instead, it is up to you to ask questions and assess each situation before you make a judgement call. Once more, the ability to travel ethically will be enhanced by any research you do before you travel into your specific destination.

Moral Dilemma: Begging

You see a small child sat on the roadside begging, do you give them money or not? This is a tricky one, on one hand £2 worth of the local currency could go a long way to feeding this child. And it will also sit well on your conscience to know that you have done something good and helped to make their day a little better. On the other hand, do you know the full story? Is this child being kept from school in order to send them begging and bring the family money. In the long term this will be detrimental to the child and mean that they may never find proper work or security.

Although travelling ethically can be difficult there are simple things you can do to ensure that your presence is beneficial to local communities. Small things such as **using locally owned businesses, guides, hotels and restaurants** will ensure that money stays in the local economy. **Buying goods from local artisans** and **paying a fair price** will encourage local people to develop their skills and remember that although haggling is often expected, an extra pound here or there for a product won't do much damage to your pocket but could make a big difference to the vendor.

We can't say it enough but **go local!** Eat local food, try local activities, meet local people. All of these actions help to promote employment and the local economy. **A local guide** will allow you to interact more directly with the community and take you beyond the usual tourist route, giving you a far better experience and insight during your travels. **Avoid big international chains** where your money provides no real benefit to local people and instead goes into some far off business man's pocket. As weird as McDonalds in Thailand might be wouldn't you rather squirm in front of a bowl of Larb Mote Daeng (a dish made from red ants!).

Think outside the box!

Some areas are predominantly vegetarian, while you might not be willing to commit to this lifestyle why not give it a go while you are there! No doubt the food will be better (the chefs will be able to taste and check it for one!) but vegetarianism has also been proven as a more environmentally friendly way of living!

Encourage fair pay and staff protection by challenging your trekking company over issues such as porters' rights. Make sure you pay drivers, cooks or anyone else a fair price for their work. **Never support a business which employs children** or exploits the people working for it.

Your presence, particularly in remote communities, may cause a stir. Blending in will make your journey more enjoyable as well as preventing you from causing offence. Small actions such as **keeping jewellery and other personal effects to a minimum** are a good idea as it could otherwise be perceived as flaunting wealth.

Moral Dilemma: Gifts

You are visiting a host community for a month and want to bring a few tokens to say thank you, maybe some sweets and toys for the children? There is no doubt that children would love to be given sweets and toys upon your arrival! But will this really benefit the community?

Children can come to expect such gifts from visitors or you may unintentionally offend local customs. Why not consider bringing photographs of your home instead?

We mustn't just think about human when we consider ethics but animals too. While the idea of interacting with wild and exotic animals while you are away may seem exciting you should always **consider the animal's rights**. Often wild animals are drugged or mistreated in order for humans to



be able to interact with them safely. It is far better to see wild animals from a distance in their natural habitat and behaving normally and happily.

Although less relating to preserving local environments and cultures, you must also remember to **make your safety your own responsibility**. Acting recklessly could not only put you in danger but also the people who may have to help you out of it. In many developing countries emergency aid is limited and while it is busy rescuing you from a problem which could easily have been avoided someone else may not be able to be rescued.

Don't Forget About the Environment

Aren't postcards perfect? Beautiful scenes of unspoiled beaches and green fields. We believe that every traveller has the duty to keep nature just a beautiful as it is on the postcard.

Moral Dilemma: Water

In the US alone, over 18 million plastic water bottles end up in landfill each year. Now take into account that in many developing countries the tap water is unsafe and recycling programmes are not as good, it is suddenly a lot of waste worldwide. Water is also often scarce which only makes the problem more difficult. Nowadays, there are many products on the market which make it quick and easy to purify your own water which will help to reduce waste tenfold. But this has a knock on effect, it means you are no longer buying water from the local vendor which could have an effect on his livelihood. Why not buy your fizzy drinks from drinks wallah, at least these are often in glass and reused, but purify your own water?

Take care of then environment! Well, you should be doing this anyway but just because you are on holiday doesn't mean you should forget to **put your litter in the bin, turn off lights and all of the usual spiel!**

Do your research – again! Each destination has its own unique environment and with that their own unique issues to deal with. Consider problems such as water scarcity and act accordingly, interacting with locals will help you to learn how to behave correctly.

Conserving local resources can only have a positive impact and this includes little things like reusing your towels or giving

your clothes to the local washer woman instead of trying (and probably failing...) to do so yourself.

No doubt you will spend a lot of time umming and ahing before you go over what to pack. Why not consider **biodegradable soaps and shampoos** and **sustainable products**? And try to leave as much packaging as you can at home, chances are recycling is much better in the UK.

If you are choosing to go trekking and exploring in the wild make sure to follow good procedures for protecting the environment, **travel in smaller groups** to avoid startling wildlife, **keep to tracks and trails** to prevent further damage to the area, **be wary of lighting campfires** and **make sure all rubbish and waste is disposed of correctly**.

Moral Dilemma: To buy at home or away?

It is nice to be prepared for a trip, to have your toothpaste, clothes, books, everything you need for your adventure! Plus, it is often easy to find eco-friendly products here in the UK so it's a win-win. But if you take everything you need with you, you are taking away an opportunity to invest in the local economy by buying goods while you are away. There is no easy answer!

Single use products are incredibly handy when you travel, sachets of shampoo stop a bottle from exploding in your bag and food on the go is much easier to handle however this can produce a lot of excess waste. Why not bring your own containers you can fill?

Hopefully, you will see some incredible wildlife – just remember, it is their home you are visiting! **Be respectful of special sites** such as breeding areas and nesting grounds, **keep your distance** and observe quietly so as not to scare or injure animals and **never feed wildlife** as human food can make them ill. A lot of plant life can take many years to grow and only seconds to destroy, **be content with taking away just a memory** and avoid picking or touching flowers, plants or corals.

Example! In some cases, it is a federal offence to harass an animal. In 2016 a 21-year-old man was arrested for taking photographs with a manatee with a maximum sentence of 60 days in prison and/or a fine of up to \$500.

How are you going to get from A to B? Without a doubt flying is not too good for the environment but there are many **carbon offsetting schemes** you can be a part of. Why not experience **local public transportation** (we promise, this is always an adventure!) or enjoying a tour on foot?

Volunteering: The Biggest Moral Dilemma?

Volunteering has the potential to be a life enhancing experience when you travel but it should be the same for the community you work with. Before you embark on any form of tourism abroad make sure to **do your research** around the initiative to be sure that your assistance will **bring long term social, economic and environmental benefits to the areas and communities involved**.

Whenever a project is included in one of our tours we spend expensive time with our in country agents to be sure that it meets our requirements and if it doesn't cut the mustard we will tell you and suggest other, more beneficial and appropriate opportunities.

If you are considering a volunteering project, take the time to mull over these questions:

- Does the project add value to the community or impose upon it? If it does add value, how so?
- What sort of local consultation went into developing the project?
- Is there a local organisation involved in the day to day management of the project?
- What are the time frames of the project? Are there long and short term goals?
- Are you taking away opportunities for local staff to be employed and are you actually qualified to take on these roles?
- How is your money being spent?
- Is the provider a responsible travel organisation?

It is all too often that we hear stories of misguided volunteer projects, where they have been left unfinished, or local communities are upset by the constant flux of people coming and going. **Be sure to really think about your volunteering opportunity and only take part if you truly feel that it will bring long term good to all of those involved.**

Take This Away With You!

We've all been somewhere which was beautiful once. Somewhere that used to be untouched and perfect before mass tourism ruined it to become just another holiday hotspot where the local culture has been pushed out for western ideals or repackaged as a tourist attraction. Tourism doesn't have to be like this! Promoting the values of responsible tourism will help to preserve those incredible experiences for future travellers and allow local communities to retain what makes them them while benefitting from the boost to their economies.

Remember: we travel to experience new things and develop a greater understanding of the world around us so help everyone to understand the principals of responsible tourism too!

Contact Us! If you have any questions or more advice on how to travel responsibly please don't hesitate to get in touch!


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