



HOW TO BE AN

**ETHICAL
TOURIST**



Now that people are starting to adopt a more mindful approach towards life and the world that surrounds us, the concept of ethical tourism has started to gain traction. Despite what some skeptics may believe, ethical tourism is not '*just a fad*'. It is a global movement born in response to the negative cultural, environmental and social impact of mass tourism.

So what IS ethical tourism?

An ethical tourist is a responsible traveler, who keeps in mind the effect their actions have on the local community and environment. It promotes the refusal to participate in activities that support or contribute to unethical practices. These issues vary according to region, and they could refer to pollution, animal abuse and exploiting the local economy, to name but a few. The nature of ethical tourism is well-represented through its synonyms such as sustainable tourism and ecotourism. In short, it means having a minimal impact on the places and communities that you visit.



The problems of mass tourism

Tourism is a global and highly profitable industry, but it is far from perfect. The problems are complex and an uninformed tourist can unwillingly support human, animal, and environmental exploitation. Let's present some examples.

Much of the profit eludes local business and instead goes into the pocket of international corporations.

Even when speaking of tourism in developing countries, the job opportunities available for native workers' pay starvation wages so mass tourism is actually detrimental to the local economy. In addition, tourism promotes the abandonment of culturally-rooted, traditional and sustainable livelihoods – such as farming – in favor of supporting the fickle and damaging tourism industry. Another problem is environmental exploitation.



The tourism industry tends to abuse local resources, which often impacts the local population. In areas where water is sparse, tourism can lead to water shortages, and local people can go without this essential resource. There is also environmental pollution and destruction, from deforestation to toxic emissions and raising the amount of plastic used (and subsequently left behind) in the area.

Exploitation often goes beyond the environment and leaves its nasty mark on the human and animal population. Children and women are the most vulnerable.

Children are turned into street sellers, farmworkers, factory employees, and women get the short end of the stick when it comes to job equality. Women and children are also in the risk group for the darkest sides of tourism relating to sex work. Animals don't have it easy either.

They are subject to captivity, abuse, and mistreatment, all for the benefit of the tourism industry. Nowadays, people have become more sympathetic towards animal welfare, but there are still plenty of places offering direct contact with "exotic" animals, such as riding elephants or petting heavily sedated wild cats.



Being an ethical tourist

Although the idea of ecotourism in itself is pretty straightforward, there is a lot of debate when it comes to the application of ethical tourism practices. There are many disagreements regarding ethics and the right way to travel sustainably. In an attempt to make things clearer, multiple organizations such as the World Committee on Tourism Ethics ([ECTE](#)) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization ([UNWTO](#)) have created codes and guidelines, so each and every travel enthusiast can become an informed and mindful tourist.

Let's go through some basic rules that every tourist should follow and some practical tips that can help you minimize your footprint in the wonderful and exotic places you wish to discover.

Respect and honor your hosts

It really pays off to learn about local customs, traditions, and living conditions. Each destination is unique, from the language to social norms, communication codes, cuisine, and heritage. By doing your research, you can better immerse yourself into the local community and become more open to experience a new way of living.

Keep in mind that the service providers and the staff of tourism facilities deserve to be treated with respect and courtesy; always ask whenever you are unsure if something is appropriate. Even something as small as taking someone's photograph shouldn't be done without consent – every person is entitled to their privacy.

Support local vendors and artisans

By buying products and handicrafts from local craftsmen and paying a fair price for them, you're directly supporting the local economy and encouraging people to maintain their customs and traditions. Embrace the diversity of the place you're visiting and hire local guides to help you around and teach you about native practices.

You can choose where and how you spend your money, so do it mindfully. Experience the local cuisine by going to family restaurants. Get the most out of your foreign experience by choosing to live with a local host instead of staying at a hotel franchise. Choices like these can make a real difference to the local economy and can turn a negative footprint into a positive one.

As a side note, be aware of local, national, and international regulations when buying souvenirs. For example, avoid buying products made from animal parts (or that come as a result of animal abuse), endangered plants, or non-sustainable materials (such as hardwood).

Protect the environment

A good rule of thumb is to leave a place as you've found it. This means taking your trash with you, using non-toxic insect repellent and eco-friendly sun protection, opting for reusable shopping bags to minimize the use of plastic, buying shampoo bars for zero waste, planning your transportation to cut emissions, reduce your energy consumption etc.

Protecting the environments also means accessing only the places open to visitors, respecting the wildlife and their habitat, being willing to visit the countryside and the places that are not as heavily marketed by tourism agencies and not supporting cruel animal practices. A good tip on how to make sure that the activity you want to partake in involves animal abuse or cruelty is to see whether or not direct contact with animals is promoted. Things such as petting, feeding, or playing with the animals often come at the cost of their freedom and happiness. Instead, choose observation-type activities, which focus on seeing the animals in their natural habitat, from a safe distance.

Overall, just be respectful and choose the 'green' alternative whenever you get the chance.

Use digital platforms to inform yourself and others

Reviews and blogs are a great way to learn more about the certain places and facilities you want to visit. Responsible travelers often provide valuable feedback and are eager to inform others about the good or bad practices they have witnessed during their vacation.

Reporting cases of injustice, discrimination, and exploitation is part of our civic duty and can, in many cases, make a change for the better. Don't underestimate the power of social media and the good it can do when people band together in support of a greater cause.

Be informed

We may have touched on this idea already, but there are many ways in which you can become an informed traveler. To make a concise list, being informed includes:

- Knowing and adhering to local regulations (respecting private areas, not interacting with wildlife, not littering, etc.)
- Refrain from giving money to begging children, and support community projects aimed to help kids and families affected by poverty instead
- Respect the locals and their lifestyle
- Research initiatives and tourism operators beforehand, making sure that they are truly “green” and that they provide decent and ethical working conditions

Conclusion

The subject of ethical tourism is complex. We hope that this little guide has given you a better idea of the importance of sustainable tourism and what we can do to become responsible travelers.

In our day and age when money rules the world, we need to make a collective effort if we want to protect and preserve tourist attractions. If we all take the time to inform ourselves and choose to put our money where our mouth is, then we can make a change for the better, for both the people and animal populations living in picturesque, touristic locations.

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