

Responsible travel entails taking steps to respect the environment and the people who inhabit it. Some of the suggestions in this guide may seem remarkably simple, such as buying locally made products, bringing a refillable water bottle, and reusing your hotel room towel, but added together these steps can reduce your impact and increase the benefits for the host community.

8 FOCUS AREAS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

TRANSPORT

Air travel makes up 3% of ALL global carbon emissions. Just one roundtrip flight to the west coast is equal to 6% of a citizen's annual carbon use.

☐ Choose carbon offset

Fly with an airline or select a tour operator that offers carbon offset, or offset your emissions through a third-party provider such as Carbon Fund, South Pole Group, or ClimateSafe. The extra cost neutralizes carbon emissions by investing in carbon-reduction projects.

☐ Book non-stop flights if possible

Reduce takeoffs and landings that create most of an airplane's carbon emissions.

☐ Consider an expedition-style cruise or a land-based tour over a large cruise

Overnight tourism typically has a smaller carbon footprint and generates far more revenue for the local economy than large-cruise tourism. Expedition-style cruises (vessels with fewer than 250 passengers) have a lower impact on the environment.

LODGING

Electricity accounts for 60% of total hotel utility expenditures, followed by water at 24%.

☐ Choose tours that stay at hotels with green certification

Look for seals of approval from certification programs such as Green Globe. Some countries, like Costa Rica, have their own ratings for sustainability adoption.

☐ Advocate for sustainability initiatives

If a hotel is lacking in this area, provide suggestions for recycling, solar power, rainwater collection, low-flow toilets, and energy-efficient lighting. Consumer demand is ultimately what drives change; don't be afraid to make suggestions.

☐ Follow tipping guidelines for the destination

Gratuities are an important source of revenue for the local community. If you're taking a group tour, understand what has been included in your tour prices to properly compensate staff.

WATER

Hotel rooms consume 53 gallons of water per day on average, including flushing toilets and average of 4.8 times per day.

☐ Take a reusable water bottle with you

Support the growing movement to ban or limit single-use plastics. To reduce waste, find accessible potable water sources for refilling, and use a BPA-free water bottle. There are also water bottles available with good internal water filtration, such as Grayl bottles (thegrayl.com).

☐ Take short showers

On average, showers use five times less water than baths. Be aware of water usage, reduce shower time, and pause water when brushing to save even more.

☐ Hang up your towels and reduce hotel laundry

Hotel linens and laundry waste energy and water. Reuse your towels, wash laundry in the sink, and hang to dry. Reuse your towels and wash laundry in the sink and hang to dry.

ENERGY

On average hotels in the U.S. spent approximately \$2,196 per available room each year on energy.

☐ Shut off lights, avoid heat/AC and close blinds

Turn off energy-using items when you exit your room. Shut blinds to keep out the sun's heat in hot weather. Even in warm climates, choose a fan over air conditioning.

☐ Walk whenever possible

There is no better way to get around and take in the surroundings than on foot. A tour bus may be unavoidable, but when time permits walk or rent a bike.

☐ Return maps and other tourist info for reuse

If you rely on paper information, once you're done return materials for future travelers.

NATURE

In 2017, 39 million acres of tropical forests disappeared. Tropical deforestation has nearly doubled over the past 15 years.

- ❑ **Stick to marked trails**
Ecosystems are fragile, and by sticking to the marked paths you avoid harming native flora. When snorkeling, be wary of fragile corals and follow your guide's lead.
- ❑ **Take a small bag to pick up trash**
A pristine experience is more enjoyable but also encourages others to keep it that way. Have a small bag ready to pick up any trash along the way.
- ❑ **Respect wildlife's need for safe distance**
It doesn't take much to teach animals to depend on humans. Feeding wildlife leads to annoyance and even attacks. Listen to your guide's advice and use your binoculars or camera to get a closer look.

TOURS

1.3 billion international trips were taken in 2017, with the travel and tourism sector accounting for 10.4% of global GDP or 9.9% of total employment.

- ❑ **Go with operators who give back to the community**
Determine if the tour operator or local activity provider gives back to the local community by hiring local guides or providing a role in protecting the area's natural resources.
- ❑ **Travel during the shoulder or low season**
Many destinations are more year-round than they might seem. Off-season travel has less impact on popular sites, provides steadier economic benefits to the community, and is often less expensive.
- ❑ **Avoid tours that exploit wild animals or nature**
Elephant riding is out. These providers support an industry of illegal capture and abuse. Also avoid Jet Ski, fast-moving ATV, or 4-wheel adventures.

PURCHASES

Global plastic waste totals 4.9 billion tons per year, projected to reach 12 billion tons by 2050.

- ❑ **Use a reusable bag when shopping**
Resist the offer of a local plastic bag. Bring your reusable bag or buy one locally.
- ❑ **Buy locally sourced products**
Support local producers and artisans to provide needed income and help preserve their culture. Avoid imports that have a larger carbon footprint.
- ❑ **Never buy products made from endangered animals or plants**
Illegal poaching threatens many species, including unsustainable hardwoods and ancient artifacts.

COMMUNITY

Globalization brings with it a loss of uniqueness of local culture, which in turn can lead to loss of identity, exclusion and even conflict.

- ❑ **Engage with the local culture**
Be sure to try local cuisine, engage with the local community, and do activities that step outside your comfort zone.
- ❑ **Learn the language, at least important phrases**
A few simple words and phrases go a long way to engaging locals and how they will treat you. Make an effort and they will too.
- ❑ **Donate your time by volunteering and provide resources**
Many operators have programs in place that help local communities with projects or provide needed items. Consider school supplies with non-profits like Pack For A Purpose.
- ❑ **Respect local customs**
Before you go, get to know a destination's local cultural traditions so you can act appropriately with your clothing and greetings. You are a guest. Expect things to be different, and you will enjoy it more!

Sustainability and the road less traveled

Travel destinations are subject to trends in the culture of the traveling public similar to the fashion business. At the same time, travelers are increasingly drawn to authentic experiences that allow them to truly connect with communities in a way that defies the regular tourism roles of tourist and local. Try mixing your experiences up to include trip or sites that are off-the-beaten path. Visit not only Machu Picchu, but also northern Peruvian sites such as Kuélap; visit not only the Galápagos Islands, but also mainland Ecuador's volcanoes and Andean communities. Or consider less known destinations in Africa and beyond!

LEARN MORE: RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL INFORMATION

- The Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) | responsibletravel.org
- Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) | gstcouncil.org
- The International Ecotourism Society | ecotourism.org
- International Sustainable Tourism Initiative | hsph.harvard.edu/c-change
- United Nations World Tourism Organization | www2.unwto.org