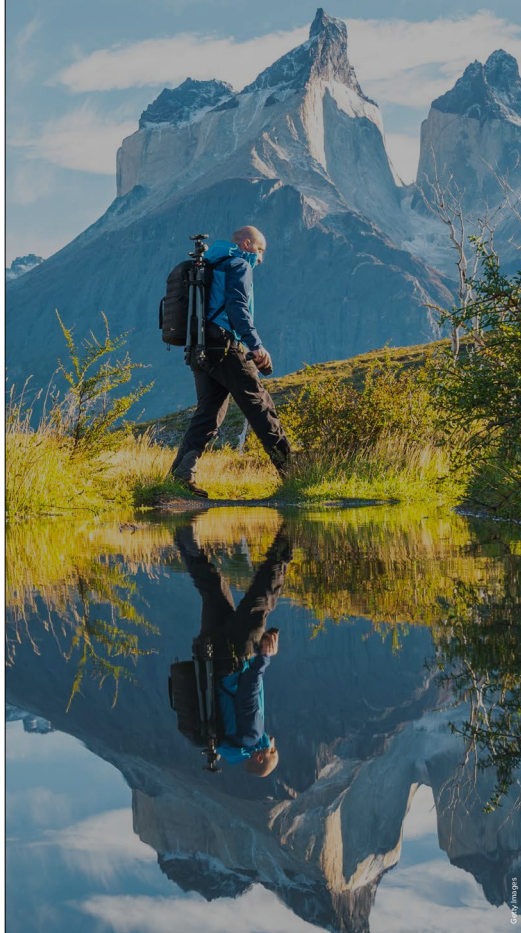


ECO | ETHICAL | RESPONSIBLE

HOW TO BE A BETTER TRAVELER

World Nomads' purpose is to challenge travelers to harness their curiosity, be brave enough to find their own journey, and to gain a richer understanding of themselves, others, and the world.



Contents

TRAVELING RESPONSIBLY

Why the Travel Choices You Make Matter	5
The Footprints Network: Making a Difference	6
20 Ways to Travel Better	7

MAPPING OUT YOUR JOURNEY

Go Your Own Way	10
9 Ways to Ease Crowded Hotspots	11
Don't Go There, Go Here	12
Controversial Destinations: Boycott or Not?	13
Find a Green Place to Stay	14
Eco-Friendly Checklist	15
Seek Out an Ethical Tour Operator	16
Ethical Tours Checklist	17
How to Support Social Enterprises on Your Travels	18

PACKING YOUR BAGS

8 Eco-Friendly Packing Tips	20
5 Easy Ways to Lighten Your Load	21
Earth-Friendly Toiletries to Take on Your Travels	22

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Is Responsible Flying Really Possible?	25
7 Simple Steps to Greener Air Travel	27
Carbon Offsets: Are They Worthwhile?	27
The Beauty of Slow Travel	28
The Lowdown on Laidback Travel	29
6 Low-Impact Ways to See the World	30

Illustrations by Elliot Nathan

Contents

EATING & DRINKING

How to Eat Local – and Like a Local – When You Travel	33
The Rise of Zero-Waste Dining	35
To Eat or Not to Eat?	37
Why You Should Avoid Drinking Cat Poo Coffee	36
To Eat or Not to Eat?	37

RESPECTFUL TRAVEL

Show a Little Kindness on Your Travels	40
Dark Tourism Destinations	42
Snap Happy: How to Take Photos Responsibly	44
Visiting Sites of Significance	46
How to Avoid Making an Embarrassing Cultural Gaffe	48
Tips on Tipping	49
Responsible Shopping	50
Ethical Haggling	51

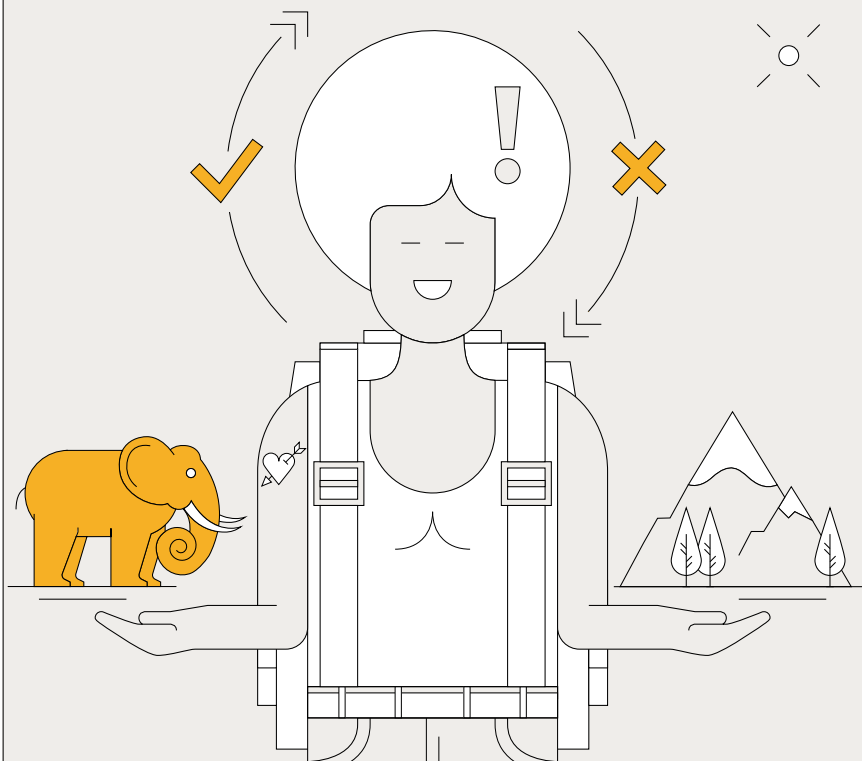
CARING FOR THE NATURAL WORLD

Let's Keep it Pristine	53
Give National Parks a Break	55
Responsible Social Media	56
National Parks Well Worth Exploring	57
Reach for the Stars	57
Animal Tourism: Is it Ever Ok?	58
Ethical Encounters With Elephants, Camels and Sharks	60

GIVING BACK ON YOUR TRAVELS

Valuable Voluntourism	64
Orphanage Visits: More Harmful Than Helpful?	65
Post-Disaster Travel	66
Responsible Travelers' Manifesto	67
Travel Insurance: Why it Matters to Responsible Travelers	68
Meet Our Contributors	70





TRAVELING RESPONSIBLY

The choices we make can have a big impact on the people and places we encounter on our travels. With a little forethought we can all become better travelers, together.

Why the Travel Choices You Make Matter

Meaningful travel experiences should not – and cannot – cost the earth. It's time to rethink how we can be more responsible travelers, writes **Amelia Hungerford**, starting with our very next trip.

Until coronavirus (COVID-19) stopped us in our tracks, more of us were traveling than ever before. In 1999, there were 639 million international tourist arrivals; in 2019, that figure had ballooned to 1.5 billion, according to the [UN World Tourism Organization](#), topping off a decade of sustained growth in tourism. China had overtaken the United States as the biggest source market for tourism, with travelers shifting from a focus on shopping to a preference for beautiful destinations and exclusive experiences.

To the growing global middle class, travel was no longer the out-of-reach luxury it once was. As the barriers to travel diminished, our desire to explore the world increased. A rise in the number of airlines and flights made it easier and cheaper to get to once-exotic places: websites, blogs and social media made it a snap to research what to do in your destination; an increase in operators made it easier to find a tour to fit your travel style and budget. We never had so much choice.

The dark side of tourism

The planet has felt the impact of this trillion-dollar industry. A report in *Nature Climate Change* put the tourism-related carbon footprint (food, accommodation, shopping, transport and activities) at 8 percent of global carbon emissions.

On top of emissions, popular destinations have struggled to cope with visitor waste and the degradation of local ecosystems. Mass tourism has also seen revenue



On the road in New Zealand

We find so much joy in travel; we love to travel! And that's OK. But we have an opportunity now to look at how we can travel better.



diverted away from local communities into the coffers of multinational companies – cruise companies and giant hotel chains, in particular.

A second chance

For all its problems, traveling is not something we should stop. We find so much joy in travel; we love to travel! And that's OK. Our world is too interconnected to simply stay at home, our minds too curious not to explore its many wonders. But we have an opportunity now to look at how we can travel better.

Although aviation technology has made planes more fuel-efficient in past decades, the sheer number of us taking off and landing (the most energy-dense parts of the process) cancels out any overall benefits. In 2019, flygskam – Swedish for 'flight shame' – entered the global lexicon and its influence is here to stay. →

In the post-coronavirus world, we'll look for other means of transport or fly greener when plane travel is unavoidable. Once we're at our destination, we'll choose to go slow and delve deep, rather than rush through 'the highlights'. We'll stay local, eat local and see the local perspective.

The pandemic revealed we are more of a global community than we realized, and it's time to travel with a community mindset. It starts by asking: How can I contribute to the community of my destination in a meaningful way? How can I be a guest rather than a traveler passing through?

A world worth fighting for

One of the most important choices travelers make is where we spend our money. Responsible travelers seek out truly [eco-friendly accommodation](#) providers and [ethical operators](#).

Finding out which suppliers support your beliefs is not always clear-cut – there are dozens of 'eco' accreditation schemes and most of them are costly for providers – but it pays to do your research to find out how your dollar can do the most good (or the least harm).

Today's responsible citizens are taking their holistic beliefs and habits with them on their travels, from saving water to reducing plastic. It's not enough for hotels to get rid of straws and miniature toiletries; travelers are helping to eliminate the build-up of single-use plastic by bringing their own water-purifying bottles. They're flying less, packing lighter, bringing reusable products, and choosing to support local growers, suppliers and tour operators.

For too long, global, mass travel has been about taking. Now, it's time to give. The more we make thoughtful and responsible choices on the road, the more they will become the norm. Our simple actions today will have consequences in the future and may mean the difference between the preservation and the destruction of the landscapes and landmarks we love so dearly for the generations to come.



Empowering communities: Parinaz Bilimoria

The Footprints Network: Making a Difference

When you buy travel insurance with World Nomads, you can make a micro-donation to a community development project.

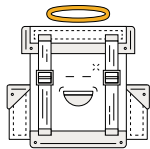
World Nomads believes that, as travelers, we have a responsibility to give back to the places we explore on our journeys. When the Southeast Asian tsunami struck in 2004, we saw an opportunity to do something that demonstrated this ethos. In the year that followed, we launched The Footprints Network; a micro-donation technology that enables our customers to donate to one of three charity projects from around the world.

We work with reputable charity partners and support projects that align with the United Nation's [Sustainable Development Goals](#). The best part? World Nomads covers all administration costs, so 100 percent of all micro-donations goes directly to the projects our customers choose to contribute to.

This same technology has been shared with other e-commerce businesses, too. Since the inception of Footprints, around 1.2 million World Nomads customers have raised more than \$3 million for 240-plus global development projects.

In addition to funding, World Nomads has [filmed some of these projects](#) – telling the stories of these amazing initiatives through mini-documentaries. You can learn more about the projects our travelers have supported [here](#).

20 Ways to Travel Better



Adopt these ethical and sustainable travel habits, and you can proudly call yourself a responsible traveler, writes **Joanna Tovia**.

1. Go with ethical tour operators

Money talks. Supporting those who are doing the right thing by local people, animals and the planet encourages more operators to do the same.

2. Book eco accommodation

Lay your head somewhere genuinely committed to sustainability. Carbon-neutral, plastic-free and conservation-minded stays will boost the feelgood factor of your trip.

3. Support social enterprises

Social enterprises empower local communities and improve people's quality of life. Seek them out – it might just be the highlight of your trip.

4. Reduce your travel footprint

What you pack, how you get around and where you stay – these choices add up to create your travel footprint. Minimize wherever you can.

5. Go where you're welcome

For every popular travel destination, there are many more that are just as fabulous – and far less crowded. Seek them out and go where your presence will truly be appreciated.

6. Rethink your toiletries

Shampoo bars over bottles; reusable menstrual products over disposable; biodegradable over plastic – go natural and reduce waste wherever possible.

7. Go plastic free

Plastic water bottles, straws, cutlery and bags create mountains of waste – pack reusable alternatives and take them home with you for your next adventure.



Tibetan monks enjoying a soapy water fight

8. Make greener flying choices

Book with the most fuel-efficient airlines, avoid stopovers if you can, and opt for the vegetarian meal option.

9. Take the slow road

Stay a little longer in one place, immerse yourself in the culture, get to know the people. Slow travel has a whole lot of appeal – and does the planet a favor.

10. Get around at ground level

Low-impact travel – by train, bicycle, boat or even your own two feet – will reveal a side to local life you'd never be privy to flying from place to place.

11. Show a little kindness

It costs you nothing, yet acts of kindness can bring some real sunshine into the days of all those helpers looking after you on your travels. →

Feel more when you travel, with **Stories**



12. Eat with awareness

Exploring new flavors in foreign lands is one of the delights of travel. Just be sure you know what you're eating and that you're not unwittingly supporting animal cruelty.

13. Be a more respectful traveler

Go gently when you travel, taking photos with sensitivity and respecting the lives and beliefs of locals – especially in places of worship. You're a guest in their country, after all.

14. Impress the locals

Minding your manners comes naturally at home, but learn a little about local etiquette before your trip to avoid making cultural mistakes that could cause embarrassment on both sides.

15. Be a good shopper

Buy local, hand-made goods over mass-produced imports, and haggle with the big picture in mind – your generosity can help locals earn a fair wage.

16. Keep it pristine

Find alternatives to overtrodden national parks, and be a responsible hiker, diver, skier and camper – let's protect the planet for the enjoyment of generations of travelers to come.



Temple offerings in Bali

Use social media mindfully for good – to inspire, inform and shine light on issues in need of our attention.

17. Be smart on social media

Geotagging can create overtouristed hotspots, alert poachers to the location of at-risk animals, and highlight where to find vulnerable children. Use social media mindfully for good – to inspire, inform and shine light on issues in need of our attention.

18. Watch out for wildlife

See animals in the wild and from a distance, rather than fueling the demand for captive-wildlife tourism. And whatever you do, give elephant riding a miss – training methods are unnecessarily cruel.

19. Give back

Travel can highlight just how fortunate we are, but choose an ethical volunteer-abroad organization to be sure you're truly doing good – helping out in an orphanage is a definite no-no.

20. Do no harm

Take care not to support industries that exploit children, animals or vulnerable populations. Sex tourism, cocaine tourism and poverty tourism should be avoided at all costs.



A Tuk Tuk drives through Sri Lanka's tea plantations



MAPPING OUT YOUR JOURNEY

Planning where you'll go and what you'll do when you get there presents a great opportunity to research which operators are worth supporting with your valuable travel dollars.

Go Your Own Way

Want to reduce your impact on the places you visit? Going where you're welcome is a great start, writes **Louise Southerden**.



It's possible that no other species has traveled as much as human beings throughout our evolutionary history, and not just for practical reasons. Egyptian pharaohs were known to take pleasure trips down the Nile as early as 1500BC and people have been taking religious pilgrimages for as long as there have been sacred sites to visit. But tourism as we know it (the term was first used in 1811) didn't properly take off until the so-called Grand Tour.

Between the 1660s and the 1840s, wealthy young Brits would spend post-university months, sometimes years, immersed in the arts, lifestyles and languages of 'the Continent', specifically France and [Italy](#).

When railway networks began spreading like weeds across [Europe](#), leisure travel finally became affordable and accessible to the middle and new working classes. Then, in 1855, English businessman Thomas Cook famously escorted the first group of travelers on a tour of Europe's great cities, simultaneously inventing the package tour and the notion of overtourism.

It was the advent of commercial air travel after World War II that really opened the world to mass international tourism. Then came a perfect storm of new factors, including the rise of low-cost airlines and cruising, Airbnb, 'bucket lists', Instagram, and Big Tourism, which turned travel into a commodity with its 'low-margins, high-volume' business model.

Barcelona, and other Spanish cities, were the first to put up 'Tourists, go home!' signs near popular sights. Venice, an island city of barely 50,000 citizens, was being loved to death by as many as 30 million visitors a year, most of them day trippers. [France](#), the world's most



Crowds take the shine off the Great Wall of China

popular country to visit, was expecting a record 100 million visitors in 2020, before COVID-19 sent visitor numbers tumbling. Even [Peru](#) was forced to introduce quotas to stem the tide of trekkers to its Inca ruins at Machu Picchu.

The invisible burden

By putting an 'invisible burden' on the places we visit – pricing residents out of their own cities, changing the character of their neighborhoods, putting a strain on infrastructure, causing environmental damage – overtourism is the antithesis of responsible travel.

"Overtourism is a situation when the life, ambience and economic wellbeing of a destination, and a destination community, are severely disrupted by tourism," says Dr David Beirman, a senior lecturer in tourism at the University of Technology Sydney.

In recent years the travel industry has been working with local, regional and →

Overtourism

International tourist arrivals worldwide reached 1.5 billion in 2019, according to the UN World Tourism Organization, and many of those people flocked to the same destinations at the same time, creating overtourism hotspots all over the globe, from Rome to Reykjavik, Berlin to Bali. COVID-19 may have pressed pause on travel, but the world's best-loved destinations are likely to bounce back to their pre-pandemic numbers in time.

national governments all over the world to find solutions, imposing limits on [Airbnb](#) rentals, for instance, and closing too-popular spots such as Thailand's Maya Bay, which was getting up to 5,000 visitors a day after *The Beach*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, was filmed there.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also responsible for imposing downtime on overtouristed destinations, providing the perfect opportunity for us to rethink how we travel.

Go where you're welcome

What can we, as travelers do, to reduce the impact of overtourism? Avoiding certain places at peak times – and traveling in the slow or shoulder seasons – is a good start.

But abandoning destinations altogether, particularly those that depend on tourism to survive, can do more harm than good. Perhaps the middle way is to do some pre-trip research and find destinations that might genuinely benefit from our presence, which should be easier post-pandemic, at least for a while.

"In the wake of COVID-19, most places in the world will be happy to welcome tourists on the proviso that they don't exceed an agreed carrying capacity," says Dr Beirman. "Communities will really be in the prime position to determine how many and what type of tourists they want."

Looking longer term, there are always going to be fascinating destinations that need and want travelers to help them recover from natural disasters or wars, terrorist incidents or civil unrest.

Some places, from Colombia to the Congo, will be shrugging off bad reputations. Others might be overshadowed by more famous neighbors or take just a little more effort to find.

The good news is that there's a world of destinations out there waiting to welcome us with open arms.

Abandoning destinations altogether, particularly those that depend on tourism to survive, can do more harm than good.

8 Ways to Ease Crowded Hotspots

1. Say yes to seconds

'Second cities' often have all the charm of their big-city cousins, without the crowds.

2. Be an untourist

Forgo Insta-worthy hotspots and embrace ordinary, daily delights in your destination, letting serendipity be your guide.

3. Find your own highs

Instead of ticking items off a wish list, find places that align with your passions and values for a more personally enriching trip.

4. Follow the money

Support locally owned businesses as much as you can, from cafes and beach bars to hotels and tour guides.

5. Travel deeply

Don't just snap a selfie and post it on social media. Explore, be curious, experience the joy of travel with all your senses – then you'll really have something to share.

6. Go slow

Spending more time in fewer destinations lets you settle into a place and experience it from the inside.

7. Get active

Hiking or biking can get you away from easily accessible, crowded spots.

8. Stay local

Want to live like a local in Europe? Try [Fairbnb](#). This ethical alternative to Airbnb donates income from short-term rentals to sustainable community projects.



Surfseekers at Levante Beach, Spain

Don't Go There, Go Here

These lesser-known destinations are even better than the overcrowded hotspots, no matter what you love doing on your travels, writes **Cassandra Brooklyn**.



If you'd like to enjoy some of the world's best food, history, art and beaches without the crowds, head to these alternative destinations instead.

Foodies

The whole of [Italy](#) is fantastic for foodies so for a delectable destination that is less known but still easy to get to, skip Rome and Venice and head to Bologna. With fewer travelers (and fewer overseas students than Florence), Bologna entices food-loving globetrotters with fantastic food – along with world-class art and architecture – without the crowds.



Art lovers

If you want to enjoy public art installations, contemporary galleries and street art without throngs of people, consider skipping Paris and heading to Chicago. Cloud Gate, a reflective steel sculpture, is the Eiffel Tower of Chicago, a city packed with art museums and galleries. The downtown Loop is adorned with public artwork and sculptures, while the former warehouse district of River North is home to more than 100 art galleries.

The Pilsen neighborhood is the go-to area for street art, where even the local metro station's staircases and walls are covered in art showcasing the heritage of the area's vibrant Mexican community.

Trekkers

Nicknamed the 'Inca Trail of the Middle East', the Jordan Trail is a stunning 400-mile (645km) route that connects Um Qais in the north to Aqaba in the south, taking hikers from oak forests to desert landscapes, and some of [Jordan](#)'s most significant UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Unlike other iconic treks (the Appalachian Trail and Camino de Santiago, for example), the Jordan Trail is still relatively unknown; you and your guide will likely be the only ones trekking along most of the route. →





Langkawi Island, Malaysia

Beachgoers

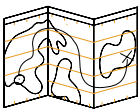
Indonesia and Thailand may get all the hype but neighboring [Malaysia](#) deserves just as much praise. Its pristine beaches are less crowded, cheaper and quieter. Tioman Island is a protected marine park and is a snorkeling and diving paradise. For traditional beach-going fun, head to Langkawi Island.



Choquequirao, Peru

History buffs

In [Peru](#), several thousand visitors crowd into Machu Picchu every day, and reservations to hike the Inca Trail fill up many months in advance. On the other hand, the nearby Incan ruins of Choquequirao, known as the 'sacred sister of Machu Picchu', receive only a few dozen visitors a day. Note that part of the reason Choquequirao receives fewer visitors is because the trek is more difficult, and you can't get there by bus or taxi.



Indonesia and Thailand may get all the hype but neighboring Malaysia deserves just as much praise.

Controversial Destinations: Boycott or Not?

If you don't agree with a country's policies or practices, should you strike it off your itinerary?

If a government is guilty of human rights abuses and corruption, or condones unethical practices concerning animal welfare or environmental issues, what should you do? The obvious answer is to take those destinations off your list, but let's consider both sides of the story.

Stay home

- Tourism is vital to the economy of many countries – influencing policies with the power of the travel dollar can be effective.
- If you visit a country that conducts atrocities or condones them, does that make you complicit? Your moral compass may help guide your decision.

Go ahead

- Immersing yourself in a culture can expand awareness on both sides.
- By spending money locally, choosing experiences responsibly, and engaging in meaningful dialogue with others, travelers can be ambassadors for change.
- As long as you're not putting yourself in any danger, there may a greater positive impact to be made by traveling, than staying at home and avoiding the world's problems. Travel can broaden our understanding of the diverse perspectives that exist in the world.
- Heed 'do not travel' warnings and stay abreast of a country's political climate before traveling.

Play it safe

Planning on kayaking, boating, hiking, cage diving, volunteering and other fun activities? Before you buy travel insurance, make sure your planned activities are included in your policy and whether there are any applicable limits, terms, conditions or exclusions, as you won't be able to add activities or change your cover level once you've purchased it. If you're not sure if your planned activities are covered, contact [World Nomads](#) and we will let you know your options.

Find a Green Place to Stay

Make sure your accommodation is the real eco-deal before making a booking, advises **Louise Southerden**.

More of us want to 'sleep green' than ever, but it's not as easy as you may think to find a truly eco-friendly place to stay.

Booking an eco-hotel, lodge, hostel or resort (for simplicity, let's use 'hotel' for all kinds of accommodation) would be a whole lot easier if there was one certification scheme to rule the world. Instead there are more than 400; some more reputable than others.

"You can't manage what you can't measure," says Stewart Moore, founder and CEO of EarthCheck, which pioneered eco-certification for the tourism industry in 1998. "It is now 28 years since the Rio Earth Summit, the first global call to arms on the need for sustainable development, and the tourism industry is still running around with tick-box schemes that give you a green star."

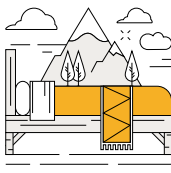
To be worthy of the name, Moore says eco-certification must at the very least be "performance-based, verified by independent parties and holistic, covering all aspects of a hotel's operation including social responsibility".

Another established eco-label for the travel industry is [Green Key](#), run by a Copenhagen-based NGO, which has certified accommodation providers, tourist attractions and restaurants in 66 countries and, like [EarthCheck](#), has a handy searchable map on its website to help you find them. Then there's [Green Globe](#), a membership-based organization that operates in 40 countries and has a website you can search by region or type of accommodation (hotels and resorts, urban, beach, etc).

Down under, [Ecotourism Australia](#)



70% of global travelers are more likely to book a place to stay if it's truly eco-friendly.



has an online [Green Travel Guide](#) listing eco-certified hotels, resorts and lodges across Australia.

Beyond the eco-certified box

Keep in mind, however, that certification is often so expensive and time-consuming that it can exclude smaller hotels that may be just as eco-worthy. In these cases, look for a sustainability section on its website, which should mention specific actions such as offering guests filtered water in glass instead of plastic bottles, composting food waste or using 100-percent renewables.

If the hotel is a certified [B Corps](#), committed to purpose as well as profit, you'll find it using the online [B Corp Directory](#). Similarly, you can find members of [1% for the Planet](#) on its interactive map; or look for the 1% logo on a hotel's website, which means that it donates one per cent of its sales to accredited environmental organizations.

You can also try searching for hotels that have won [World Responsible Tourism Awards](#). →

Go small, and communal

Some types of accommodation are naturally eco, without needing to be certified. Tiny house stays, cabins, wilderness huts, and glamping set-ups, for instance, all have small, often temporary, footprints.

Backpacker hostels also tend to have a built-in eco-ethos, given that guests share rooms (reducing each traveler's impact) and use communal kitchens and living areas. [Hostelling International](#), along with its national hostel organizations, has long had a sustainable streak.

House swapping is another low-cost environmentally friendly option. "Instead of continually building new hotel skyscrapers to accommodate already overcrowded tourist areas and further destroying natural habitats, home exchange provides a platform for continued tourism with less environmental impact," says Alexandra Scarpino, Australia and New Zealand country manager for global house-swapping website [Home Exchange](#), which lists more than 400,000 properties worldwide.

Skip the greenwash cycle

Asking guests to hang up their towels to choose not to have their bed linen changed daily is no longer enough to deserve eco credentials.

Banning single-use plastics is heading that way too; it's a quick fix, makes the hotel look green and is high in emotional engagement – nobody likes seeing plastic on beaches or harming sea birds and turtles – but it doesn't say much about the hotel's real environmental impact.

So, how do we avoid being duped by so-called 'greenwashing'? Don't be afraid to contact the hotel directly to ask about sustainability. The more we all do this, the more we normalize sustainable practices and the better off the planet will be.

Asking guests to hang up their towels or to choose not to have their bed linen changed daily is no longer enough to earn hotels eco credentials.

Eco-friendly Checklist

Ask these questions before booking to be sure your accommodation is as green as it claims to be.

1. Was it sustainably built?

Does it reduce energy use via passive-solar design? Was it built with locally sourced eco-friendly materials?

2. Is it carbon-neutral?

Is it committed to offsetting guests' stays by, say, planting trees?

3. Can I stay without a car?

Are there bikes to use, free shuttles to town, and public transport options?

4. Is it plastic-free?

Are the toiletries in bulk dispensers? Does it avoid single-use plastics?

5. Does it strive for 'zero-miles'?

Does it source seasonal, local, organic and/or sustainably sourced food?

6. Is it zero-waste?

Is it committed to reducing all waste, including food waste?

7. Is it energy-wise?

Is it powered by renewable energy and does it minimize energy use?

8. Is it wildlife friendly?

Does it fund conservation initiatives?

9. Is it close to nature?

Are there low-impact, nature-based activities on offer in the area?



Seek Out an Ethical Tour Operator

It's not where we go but how we travel that matters, writes Louise Southerden.

If you're reading this, chances are you want to do the right thing when you travel. You want to minimize your carbon footprint, tread lightly, and contribute to local economies, particularly in developing countries.

You're not alone. Almost three-quarters of travelers surveyed by [Booking.com](#) in 2019 (more than 18,000 people from 18 countries) believe we need to make more sustainable choices when we travel, and 71 percent think travel companies should offer more sustainable travel choices.

One of the best ways to make sure your hard-earned travel funds have a positive impact is by traveling with an ethical tour operator.

Traveling with a company that has a strong track record of operating ethically removes a lot of the legwork, and guesswork, you'd otherwise have to do to ensure that every detail of your trip, from where you stay to which activities you do, is environmentally, socially and culturally responsible.

There are other advantages to choosing a tour operator with ethics in mind, for you as well as the places you visit, so it's worth taking your time with it.

"By choosing an ethical tour operator, travelers are not only providing local communities with an income, they are also connecting with local people in a meaningful way that adds to a more authentic and memorable travel experience," says Jake Hilbert, Global Purpose Specialist at [G Adventures](#).

This goes for animal-based tours too. "Booking with a tour operator that has a strong animal-welfare policy ensures you'll have an animal-friendly experience while reducing the demand for cruel animal attractions," says [World Animal Protection](#) Campaign Executive Ben Pearson.



How can I be sure a tour operator is ethical?

Any tour operator that's serious about operating ethically will list specific and authentic measures it has in place. These could include a responsible travel policy or animal welfare guidelines, for instance, rather than making broad statements such as "we care about the planet" or "we respect local communities".

"Look for operators that demonstrate their commitment to sustainability in tangible ways, by the way they operate their business, the type of itineraries they offer and how they treat their people," advises Donna Lawrence, Responsible Travel Manager at [World Expeditions](#).

It's also wise to check that the company has just one local partner managing the itinerary in each destination, she says, to ensure continuity and increase the likelihood that the entire itinerary will be ethical.

"With multiple local partners, it's easy for the ethical aspects of the trip to get lost or diluted," Lawrence says. →



Any tour operator serious about operating ethically will list specific and authentic measures it has in place.

Going your own way?

Planning to travel independently instead of on a group tour, booking activities along the way? The same rules apply. Decide which issue or issues matter most to you – such as climate action, conservation or community-based tourism – and choose a company that aligns with your values, says Jake Hilbert of G Adventures, while also taking responsibility for your own actions.

“Our founder, social entrepreneur Bruce Poon Tip, believes tourism, when done right, has the potential to be the greatest form of wealth distribution the world has ever seen,” says Hilbert. “For independent travelers to do the right thing, that means making ethical choices such as supporting local communities and economies by eating at local restaurants, using local transport, staying in locally owned accommodation and using local guides.”

You can also use an aggregator such as the UK-based [Responsible Travel](#), which only sells trips that meet its strict responsible travel criteria.

It won't sell, for instance, large ship cruises, rodeos, any trips involving elephant-riding or captive orcas or dolphins, or orphanage tourism.

Any certifications to look for?

Look for logos indicating that the company is, say, a certified B Corp, adheres to Leave No Trace principles or is a member of 1% for the Planet, which means it donates one per cent of its net profits to environmental organizations.

World Animal Protection has tools to help you assess if wildlife sanctuaries or animal-based experiences are ethically run, including a 12-page animal-friendly travel checklist. You can also check if the tour operator you're planning to use is one of the 200-plus companies that have joined the Coalition for Ethical Wildlife Tourism and pledged not to sell or promote tours that include wildlife entertainment.

Ethical Tours Checklist

Keep these criteria in mind before you book your next trip to be sure you stay on a responsible track.

1. Carbon offsets

Does the trip cost include carbon offsets? Two global adventure tour companies now offering this are World Expeditions and Intrepid Travel, which has also been carbon neutral since 2010.

2. Animal welfare

Does the company have an animal-welfare policy, preferably one endorsed by independent animal-welfare experts? At the very least, don't travel with any operators that exploit wild animals. “If you can ride, touch, feed or take a selfie with a wild animal, or see it perform tricks, you can be sure cruelty has been involved at some point,” says Ben Pearson of World Animal Protection.

3. Child safety

Think Child Safe, based in Cambodia, advises against visiting orphanages or giving to begging children. Ethical tours strive to keep children safe, discourage child labor and to keep families together.

4. Ethical eating

Try to eat seasonal, local, organic wholefoods based around local traditions rather than ‘Western-style’. Ethical tours should also include plant-based meal options to encourage planet-friendly eating.

5. Local heroes

Ethical travelers try to ensure as much of their money as possible stays in communities. Seek out operators with a similar mindset.

6. Clean and green

Ethical tour operators take action to reduce negative impacts on the natural environment in the destinations they visit. They might reduce single-use plastics or collect litter on some of their trips, as World Expeditions does in partnership with [10 Pieces](#).

7. Small is best

Small group tours, with an average of 10 people, help us travel more responsibly. By interacting on a personal level with the people and places we visit, we're more likely to understand the issues affecting these places and how we can help.

8. Give back

Ethical tour operators often have (or have links with) not-for-profit foundations that help them support the communities they visit.

9. Porter protection

Workers transporting gear and supplies must be well paid, trained, clothed and supported. Ethical tour operators support organizations such as the International Porter Protection Group and International Mountain Explorers Connection.

10. The bigger picture

Ethical tour operators will always be looking ahead, thinking long term and working towards big goals such as gender parity and climate action, two of the United Nations' 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

How to Support Social Enterprises on Your Travels

Travel is fun, but if you can also help people living in the places you visit, isn't that even better? **Craig Tansley** tells us more.



Empowered village women in Bangladesh

Social enterprises are on the rise, and travelers in the know are seeking them out to do some good with their travel dollars – and deepen their travel experience in the process.

Social enterprises use commercial strategies to make money, which they then reinvest back into the local community. So, instead of all the profits going into a company's back pocket, the funds improve the quality of life for local communities, help protect the natural environment, or help people hold on to their traditions and cultural identities.

Social enterprises are yours to discover, all over the world. It could be a restaurant in London that employs women from refugee or migrant backgrounds, or a guesthouse run by locals living in the slums of India.

"By choosing to visit a social enterprise café, handicraft shop or hostel, the

dollars you spend are being reinvested into the local community," says [Planter Foundation](#) Program Manager, Alanna Wallace. "In return, a traveler gets an authentic experience connecting with local people, giving back to the place they are visiting in a meaningful way."

Tours with local guides can also bring you closer to understanding how life is in the places you visit, while creating an income for the people you meet on your tour.

"Travelers often say the social enterprise visit is the highlight of their trip," [The Intrepid Foundation](#) General Manager Amy Bolger says. "Whether it's supporting the crafts of female Syrian refugees in Istanbul, or meeting marginalized youth working at a café in Peru, giving back to the local community gives back to our individual travelers just as much, if not more."

**WATCH:
PEOPLE
DOING
GOOD**



Restaurants with heart

You can empower disadvantaged young people in Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar – just by eating out. Watch the [Footprints video](#).



Training locals for a better life

[Learn how](#) Sapa O'Chau's responsible treks and homestays benefit local people in Sapa, Vietnam, through education and employment.



Opportunity, not charity

[See how](#) OneSeed Expeditions helps Anza invest in local entrepreneurs and support start-ups and social enterprises to get off the ground in Tanzania.

Contents

Traveling responsibly

Plan your trip

Pack your bags

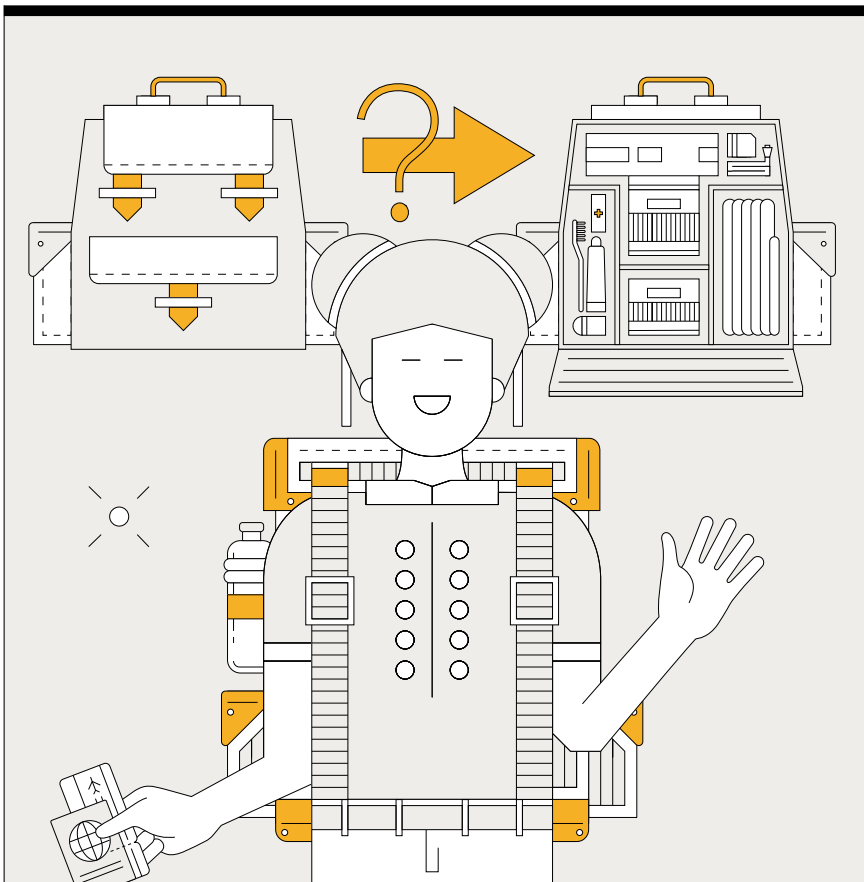
Getting there & around

Eating & drinking

Respectful travel

Nature care

Giving back



PACKING YOUR BAGS

Responsible travel begins before you leave home. It's easy to pack with the environment in mind, and the planet will benefit long after your plane touches down on the tarmac.

Eco-Friendly Packing Tips

It can be hard to maintain our green habits when we hit the road. These suitcase additions will keep you on the right track, writes **Sam van Egmond**.



Filtering water bottle

Avoid contributing to the estimated one million plastic bottles bought around the world every minute by packing a refillable water bottle, preferably one that's stainless steel. If you must take plastic (it's lighter, we get it), ensure it is BPA-free. You'll often find filtered water taps at hotels and airports for on-the-go refills, and if you're traveling to a place where there might not be access to clean water, [Grayl's](#) purifying water bottles remove bacteria, viruses, parasites and microplastics on the go.



Pack a refillable water bottle to reduce plastic waste.

Plastic-free cutlery and straws

Traveling and takeaway food go hand-in-hand, with plastic cutlery being one of the biggest examples of single-use plastic. Enjoy street eats responsibly by packing a set of utensils made from a biodegradable material such as bamboo or beechwood. Straws are also one of the worst environmental offenders – used for a mere few minutes, they take hundreds of years to break down – so have a reusable stainless-steel option on hand.

Reusable coffee cup

If you're a coffee drinker, it's likely you already own a KeepCup or similar reusable cup that you take to your local barista. This is an important habit to uphold when you travel. With more than 500 billion coffee cups disposed of each year, all that waste has to go somewhere. Some cafés offer a discount to customers who bring their own cup, saving you precious travel dollars. Opting for a lightweight bamboo cup will make it easier to carry around between coffees.

Solar charger and light

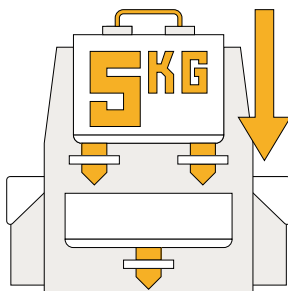
Harness the energy of the sun while you explore the outdoors – a solar-powered charger comes in handy on nature-based adventures where there are no power outlets, or to give your phone a quick top-up throughout the day on more urban outings. Carry a backpack that incorporates solar panels and a power bank to charge devices on the go. If you plan to camp, a solar-powered light in a collapsible design will make an ideal travel companion.

Reusable food containers

Stainless-steel jars with leak-proof lids are great for portable meals and storing leftovers, and they're virtually indestructible. Take a couple when you head out to eat and ask vendors to fill them up instead of using their disposable containers. Additionally, swap zip-lock bags for a reusable silicone food pouch that is just as good at keeping your snacks fresh. →

Learn all about our creative travel **Scholarships**





5 Easy Ways to Lighten Your Load

The lighter your luggage, the less fuel a plane requires to get you and your bags to your destination. It pays to take a minimalist approach.

1. Choose the right bag

Avoid overpacking with a smaller bag or suitcase – you won't be tempted to throw in all of those what-if items as you'll only have room for the essentials.

2. Keep clothes neutral

Keep to simple pieces that can be mix and matched. Stick to classic colors such as black, gray and navy, which also do a good job of looking cleaner for longer!

3. Pack multifunctional pieces

Jackets with zip-off sleeves, liners and hoods can adapt to all weather conditions. A Turkish towel doubles as a sarong or blanket, and a buff can act as a face mask, headwear or scarf.

4. Downsize your toiletries

Pack double-duty products – a shampoo bar can be used as a body wash; coconut oil for use on skin, hair and removing your makeup.

5. Borrow what you can

Avoid buying and packing things you can live without or will only use a handful of times – is that hairdryer, coffee maker or yoga mat really essential? Borrow those items you don't have but really need from friends or fellow travelers.

Eco-friendly toiletries

The benefits of a few simple swaps to your personal-care routine can really add up. Do your research and know which ingredients to avoid instead of buying products just because they are labelled 'eco-friendly' or 'natural'. Check that products don't contain toxic chemicals and if they are packaged in biodegradable materials, that's all the better.

Reusable shopping bags

There is no excuse for accepting a plastic bag, especially when it's estimated one trillion of them are used and discarded worldwide each year. A humble reusable tote is easily foldable, takes up very little space and will prove invaluable, whether it's for grocery shopping, a trip to the beach or to use for laundry. Pack a sturdy canvas carryall as well as a mesh produce bag for fruit and veggies.

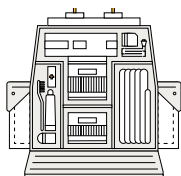
Portable washing bag and laundry bar

Washing machines use a lot of water and energy, and coin laundries are not always easy to come by. A good option is a [Scrubba](#) wash bag, a tiny, portable 'washing machine' that keeps your clothes fresh and clean. Don't forget to throw in a plant-based laundry bar, powder or detergent and a travel clothesline to wash clothes on the go.



There is no excuse for accepting a plastic bag, especially when it's estimated one trillion of them are used and discarded worldwide each year.

Earth-Friendly Toiletries to Take on Your Travels



Packing natural and ethical personal-care products is better for you and the planet. These simple swaps will help ensure your travel toiletries are healthy and harmless, writes **Sam van Egmond**.

Shampoo bars

As many as 80 billion plastic shampoo and conditioner bottles are thrown out around the world every year, some of which end up in our oceans. Solid bars are a waste-free alternative – try [Ethique](#), a B Corp-certified company graded with the highest of social and environmental standards, whose solid beauty bars can be stored in a jar, tin or beeswax wrap.

Chemical-free skincare

The harsh chemicals found in many moisturizers and cleansers are toxic to you and the environment. Do your research and find out which ingredients to avoid – ‘eco-friendly’ or ‘natural’ products aren’t always what they claim – as well as seeking out biodegradable packaging wherever possible.

Reusable face washer

Ditch the plastic-packaged face wipes – made from polyesters and polypropylene that can take decades to break down – and pack a lightweight muslin cloth that can be used with soap and warm water to clean away everyday impurities.

Microplastic-free exfoliators

The tiny beads found in face and body scrubs are too small to be captured in wastewater treatment systems, washing straight into the ocean where they harm marine life. Avoid polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA) and



Bamboo beats plastic

‘Eco-friendly’ or ‘natural’ products aren’t always what they claim. Do your research and seek out biodegradable packaging.

polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), and look for natural alternatives like salt, sugar and coffee.

Natural deodorant

Sweating regulates your body’s temperature and is a natural detoxification process we shouldn’t be trying to stop. Trade in your antiperspirant for a deodorant that uses natural ingredients such as baking soda to help absorb moisture and neutralize unpleasant body odor.

Fabric face mask

Social distancing is likely to be with us for some time to come, but a reusable cloth face mask can provide some protection – to you and those around you. Make your own or buy a few cloth masks to take on your travels, and wash them regularly. →

Travel smart with our **Safety** advice





Fabric masks are useful travel companions

Bamboo toothbrush

One of the easiest ways to reduce plastic waste is by swapping your plastic toothbrush for one made with bamboo – once your brush needs replacing, just remove the bristles and recycle or compost the handle.

Non-toxic toothpaste

Eco-friendly toothpaste packaging can be hard to come by, but a step in the right direction is choosing natural formulas that effectively clean your teeth with ingredients such as baking soda, spearmint and tea-tree oil.

Plant-based floss

Most dental floss is made from synthetic materials such as nylon and is dispensed from a plastic, disposable case. Look for alternatives created from sustainable bamboo, charcoal fiber or wax-coated silk, which often come in a cardboard box or glass jar.

Eco-friendly menstrual products

Using a menstrual cup or reusable cotton sanitary pads can save you hundreds of dollars on disposable pads and tampons. Another waste-free option is period-proof underwear such as [Thinix](#), which can be washed and reused, are ideal for traveling and take up very little space.

IT'S A FACT

80

The number, in billions, of shampoo and conditioner bottles disposed of each year.

Biodegradable cotton buds

Replace plastic cotton buds with those that have bamboo or paper stems, and can simply be thrown into your organic waste or composted, and usually come in biodegradable packaging.

Natural insect repellent

There are hard-working natural sprays that use antibacterial essential oils such as citronella, tea tree and eucalyptus rather than harsh chemicals to keep bugs at bay. If you're traveling in countries where malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases are present, however, a DEET-based repellent may be necessary.

Plastic-free razors

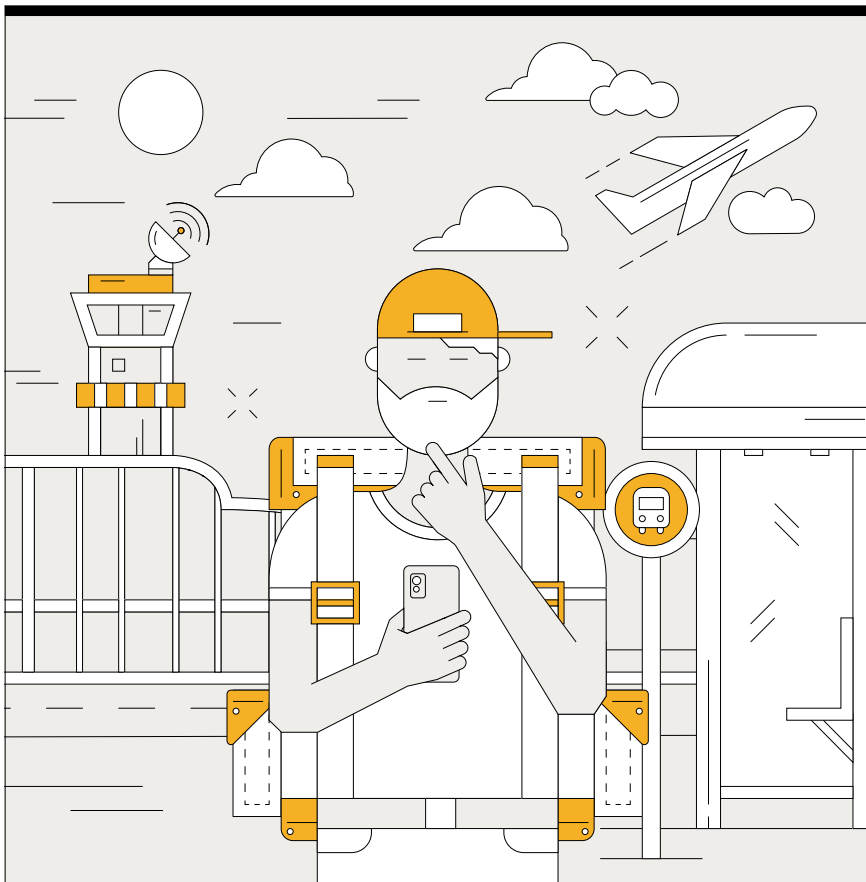
Investing in a stainless-steel safety razor will save you a considerable amount of money over time, and significantly reduce plastic waste. A good quality razor will last a lifetime if looked after – only the blades need replacing.

Reef-safe sunscreen

Protect our marine ecosystems as well as your skin with a sunscreen free of oxybenzone – this common chemical is proven to damage coral reefs. Eco-friendly sunscreens are becoming easier to find, but some labelled 'reef-friendly' still contain oxybenzone so check the ingredients carefully.



Pack with the planet in mind



GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are ways to fly more responsibly, but the decisions you make once you get there are just as important. Why not take in the delights of a destination at a slower pace and reduce your travel footprint?

Is Responsible Flying Really Possible?

Air travel has opened up the world like never before but the environment is paying. Fortunately, there are ways to reduce your impact, writes **Liz Durnan**.



It's a bitter contradiction for travelers, that the natural world we love so much is being impacted by our very enjoyment of it. It can be helpful to remember the enormous good travel does in the world – we needn't feel guilty for providing tourism jobs, helping cultures better understand each other, or travel's ability to help us appreciate history and the wonders of the natural world.

So rather than give up on exploring the world, let's think about what we can do to get there more responsibly.

The cost of flying

There's no escaping the figures; the International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates air travel's contribution to global carbon emissions is around 2 percent and rising at alarming levels, with predictions of growth to as much as 16 percent by 2050 – even with the major lull in air traffic caused by COVID-19.

Eke Eijgelaar, a researcher in Sustainable Tourism at the [Centre for Sustainability, Tourism and Transport](#) highlights the dilemma faced by frequent fliers: "For most tourists, the environment is actually one, if not the key, motivation to travel. But air travel happens to bring global tourism on a crash course with the climate targets national and global leaders have set, for example, in Paris."

According to Eijgelaar, environmentally conscious air travel is "a contradiction in terms". However, he believes we can travel more responsibly by choosing:



- the airline with the lowest average emissions
- airplanes with the lowest emissions per passenger or per mile
- to fly economy instead of business for lower emissions per seat
- to avoid short-haul flights, stopovers and detours
- to fly for shorter distances and less frequently.

Can flying ever be sustainable?

Environmentalist Jon Dee of [The Do Something Foundation](#) believes in the upsides of flying. "There are lots of positives to air travel. It benefits the global economy and it positively exposes people to different cultures," he says. "But the simple fact is that air travel has a major environmental impact that needs to be reduced." In addition to steps we can take as individuals, the biggest →

It can be helpful to remember the enormous good travel does in the world.

changes to reduce emissions produced by flying need to come from the airlines.

According to Dee, airlines should follow the car industry's example of transitioning to new technologies, which have already greatly reduced the polluting impact of car travel. "The good news is that this is very achievable," he says. "Although jet engines are the only option right now, the aerospace industry is already working on electric and hybrid propulsion systems for aircraft."

"Rolls Royce is launching an electric plane that can fly at almost 300mph (480kmh) for 200mi (320km) on a single charge. That's the distance from London to Paris. "While this is a small plane, it's achieving a speed and distance that was previously not achievable. There is great potential for this technology and hydrogen technology in the short-haul and commuter air travel markets."

The other possible game-changer is low-carbon jet fuel. "What excites me the most is the potential to make jet fuel from thin air – to capture CO2 from the atmosphere and turn it into jet fuel," Dee says.

Time to change our travel habits

In the meantime, the best thing we can do as individuals to reduce our impact is to modify our travel habits. One way is to opt for other forms of travel than flying where we can.

Eijelaar suggests traveling by train, coach or car, if the vehicle is an efficient model and fully occupied.

"A low- to moderate-efficiency car with full occupancy will also keep you on relatively low emissions for now. Electric cars on renewable energy will be one of the solutions for the near future, next to train and coach."

But this means avoiding long-haul trips, and that's not an easy compromise for travel lovers to accept, especially if they don't live in Europe. "For tourism to become more climate-compatible, we should change destinations –



IT'S A FACT

6.7

The number, in millions, of tons of cabin waste generated by airlines every year.

seek out places in our own region instead of worldwide," Eijelaar says. "It's a challenge, but then many global travelers hardly know their own country or continent."

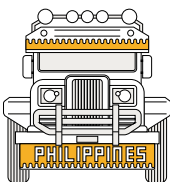
Dee agrees that our travel behavior is crucial to reducing emissions:

"The first decision is whether you need to take that flight in the first place. The coronavirus pandemic has shown people that business can be effectively carried out using video conferencing."

"However, there are times when there is no alternative but to meet people face to face in other countries. To that end, if we're serious about reducing the environmental impact of flights, we have to decouple airline emissions growth from traffic growth."

One other way is by addressing the volume of waste produced on every flight, especially food and plastic. Think of all those discarded meals, throwaway cups and cutlery, headphones and toothbrushes. The IATA estimates that airlines generated about 6.7 million tons of cabin waste in one year.

Many airlines are already starting to make serious changes, such as Air New Zealand abolishing single-use plastics. In the meantime, we can all take a stand by bringing our own reusable cups and declining bottled water. Travel should be a force for good, after all.





Flights can be offset with tree-planting programs

Sustainable travel: Liz Durnan

Carbon Offsets: Are They Worthwhile?

Does it really matter if you tick the carbon-offset box when booking flights online?

About a third of airlines give passengers the option to add a few dollars to the cost of their airline ticket at the time of booking, the money going to projects that help the environment – thus, offsetting the carbon emissions generated by their seat on the plane. Carbon-offset programs range from planting forests to renewable energy projects. If an airline doesn't have a carbon-offset program, passengers can offset their flights through independent carbon-offset companies such as [My Climate](#).

Easy way out?

Experts are split on how effective carbon-offset programs are. Some say they don't come close to matching the emissions produced by flying and that they promote complacency. "Offsetting does not stimulate people to make that much-needed behavioral change and cut actual emissions," says Dutch sustainability researcher, Eke Eijgelaar. "Facilitating offsetting without linking the offsets to emission avoidance and reduction will never achieve the levels of overall emissions reductions that are needed."

A chance to do better

Australian environmentalist Jon Dee sees value in offsetting, but says the system needs improvement. "Offsets can play a positive role in reducing the environmental impact of air travel but the current voluntary approach to offsets is simply not working," he says. "All flights should be 100 percent offset by the airline on behalf of their customers and that cost should be added to the ticket [price]. If a passenger doesn't want to offset like that, they should have ability to opt out. This is a simple and quick way to immediately reduce the environmental impact of air travel and it would be relatively cheap to do."

7 Simple Steps to Greener Air Travel

It may be easier than you think to reduce the impact of flying.

1. Be fuel efficient

Not all planes use the same amount of fuel per passenger, per mile. More modern aircraft are usually the most efficient. For example, twin-engine aircraft use less fuel than four-engine crafts, so Boeing's 787 and the Airbus A350 are more efficient than a Boeing 747 or the A380.

2. Save with economy

It's not just money you'll save by opting for an economy ticket, you'll also be responsible for four times less emissions than if you were kicking back in business class.

3. Choose an efficient airline

Do your research and find out what your preferred airline is doing to be more efficient. Some are starting to get wise to waste and going plastic free, others are using more energy-efficient aircraft.

4. Avoid detours and layovers

This really matters, because taking off and landing are the most fuel-guzzling parts of the flight, and flying short distances produces more emissions per mile. So, take non-stop flights if possible, avoiding unnecessary layovers and detours.

5. Pack lightly

Every extra pound of luggage adds to your emissions so consider whether you really do need that extra pair of shoes.

6. Fly meat-free

Farming and processing animals for meat generates 20 times the greenhouse gases of vegetables, so opt for the vegetarian meal option when booking your flight.

7. Be an infrequent flier

Flying less often is the best choice you can make. Could you travel using another mode of transport? And could you commit to using low-impact forms of transport once you reach your destination to offset the emissions from your flight?

The Beauty of Slow Travel

From cabins in the woods to leisurely stays in the world's great cities, 'slow travel' has the potential to be good for us and the planet, writes **Louise Southerden**.

Slow, in travel terms isn't just referring to the speed with which you reach your destination. Sure, 'slow traveling' can mean trekking in the Himalayas or houseboating in Kerala, but it's more of an attitude than a concept of time. It's about taking a 'slow' perspective once you get there; spending more time seeing less.

"Slow travel is the antithesis of overcrowded tourist hotspots, bucket lists and rushing around trying to see everything," says travel writer Penny Watson, author of *Slow Travel: Reconnecting with the World at Your Own Pace*.

It also goes hand in hand with ethical, eco-friendly travel, she says. "Because it's immersive, curious, authentic and interactive, slow travel makes us more mindful of our surroundings, and when that happens, we can't help but tread more lightly on the places we visit."

Once upon a time, everyone traveled slowly – by camel or on foot, by ship or in the saddle. Today there are as many ways to 'travel slow' as there are slow travelers to do them. Take a hike, or a (local) train. Spend a week in a monastery. Do at a 'digital detox' wellness retreat.

Why not rent an apartment in Toronto or Tangiers and test-drive local life for a while? You'll get a fresh perspective on another culture, as it's being lived right now, not frozen in time as it might be on an organized tour. The people living there might see you differently too.

When you're not just another tourist passing through, you're doing your bit for cross-cultural understanding. It's a chance to be an 'ambassador for peace', according to the New York-based



Walking is an immersive way to see Japan

International Institute for Peace through Tourism, created in 1986 to make travel the world's 'first global peace industry'.

Why is slow travel responsible?

It makes intuitive sense. Slowing down, whether on safari in [South Africa](#) or hiking in [New Zealand](#), gives us time to tune in to places, which helps us understand them – the way people live, the environmental and social challenges they face – and, ideally, adjust our actions accordingly.

Some of my most memorable travel moments have also been my slowest. Hiking in the mountains of [Mongolia](#), a summer snowstorm forced me and my friends to shelter in a nomad family's *ger* for the night, giving us an intimate glimpse of their daily lives; while living amid rice paddies in southern Kyushu on a working holiday opened my eyes to a very non-Tokyo [Japan](#) and taught me how to live communally and simply. →

When you're not just another tourist passing through, you're doing your bit for cross-cultural understanding. It's a chance to be an 'ambassador for peace'.

The Lowdown on Laidback Travel

Travel writer Penny Watson, author of *Slow Travel: Reconnecting with the World at Your Own Pace*, shares her thoughts on traveling differently.

Q: Has how you travel changed?

A: Ten years ago, I wanted to see the world, now I want to experience it. I'm also far more interested in the people who inhabit the destinations I go to.

Q: How would you define slow travel?

A: Slow travel embraces more immersive, curious, authentic and interactive travel experiences – it is travel to transform mind and body through connection with people and places. It's the antidote to overcrowded tourist hot spots and tired checklist experiences; rather, it emerges from our longing to seek connection with ourselves and our lives in more intense and meaningful ways.

Q: Are people seeking more meaningful travel experiences?

A: Definitely. I think this is the modern zeitgeist. Our connectedness to the digital world is driving a need for more downtime, more me-time, more time to connect to something other than our screens.

Q: What are the benefits of staying in one place longer?

A: The opportunity for true immersion through people and place: getting to know the barista at the same coffee shop each day, having actual conversations with the woman who owns the guesthouse, connecting with fellow travelers, getting orientated in local neighborhoods, eating as much local food as possible... it all adds to the experience.

Q: What are your favorite things to do when you travel?

A: In Seville, [Spain](#), I used to frequent an authentic bar with a mosaic-tiled façade and wine barrels for tables. I'd eat little pepito rolls stuffed with prawns and garlic mayonnaise and wash them down with a cold can of beer. This kind of immersion in a foreign city is what makes me tick.

One of the best things about staying in one place is that you can stop being just an observer and become part of the scenes unfolding around you.



Even on short trips, slow travel is possible. I spent three days as an 'untourist' in Venice, taking slow walks, stopping to chat with artists and mask-makers, and taking pictures of cats sitting like ornaments in sunny windows. At first it felt like heresy to sidestep the must-see sights in one of the world's great cities; then it felt liberating.

The benefits of going slow

Slow travel is good for us in other ways, too, calming our over-stimulated nervous systems, giving us a break from the ongoing epidemic of busyness that infects our lives. It's a chance to press 'pause' and, hopefully, 'reset'.

"The essence of holidays, and therefore travel, is to get what you don't get enough of the rest of the time," writes Pico Iyer in his book *The Art of Stillness*.

"And for more and more of us, this isn't movement, diversion or stimulation; we've got plenty of that in the palms of our hands. It's the opposite."

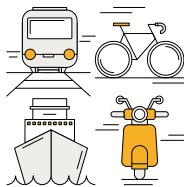
What to do while you're there

One of the best things about staying in one place is that you can stop being just an observer and become part of the scenes unfolding around you. You can relax into being there, put your camera or phone away for a while, step into the pictures you'd otherwise be taking and experience them, body and soul.

Doing nothing is a core 'slow travel' non-activity, letting whims and chance encounters guide you. You could learn a new language: classes in the morning, real-life conversations in the afternoons. Take tango lessons in Buenos Aires, cooking classes in Tuscany, art workshops in Arizona. Or just tune into the daily rhythm of life as it's lived wherever you find yourself: by riding bikes along city streets, shopping with the locals at local markets, taking afternoon siestas. Experienced the slow way, the world isn't just your oyster; it's also the pearl inside.

6 Low-Impact Ways to See the World

Getting around under your own steam and other low-emission modes of transport can open your eyes to a destination in rewarding ways, writes **Liz Durnan**.



1. Cycling in Europe

Europe's stunning scenery makes it one of the most appealing cycling destinations, but for those seeking to cycle along a road less traveled, wind your way along the Istrian Coast, from [Italy](#) to [Croatia](#) – it's a route steeped in history, abundant in natural beauty, and it isn't too taxing.

Start in Trieste and follow the short stretch of Italian coastline into the tiny country of [Slovenia](#). Here you can marvel at medieval towns with their Venetian gothic architecture, and pass the beautiful beaches of the Adriatic, all in a few hours, before cycling on to Croatia.

Join a tour or plan the route yourself and book accommodation along the way. Allow seven days but take longer if you can and relax into the journey.

2. India by train

Traversing parts of [India](#) by train is an exciting way to absorb one of the world's most fascinating countries. Choose a high-end tour by train if you must, but you'll miss out on the mayhem and fun to be had on the public network, which offers eight or nine classes.

A good middle ground for comfort, affordability and seeing more of authentic Indian life is second-class (AC2) on the public network. This class is air-conditioned, and features two-tier bunks divided by a curtain, with blanket, sheet and pillow provided.

There are numerous routes. One option is to start at Delhi in the north, wind your way through Rajasthan – with a stop at the scenic city of Udaipur



– and continue your way down the west coast, stopping at Mumbai, and on to the beach destination of Goa.

Remember to book in advance, expect delays, and keep a close eye on your luggage – theft is a real risk here. And bring your own toilet paper and hand sanitizer, just in case.

3. Japan on foot

A stand-out hike for the reasonably fit walker is the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage, one of only two UNESCO World Heritage pilgrimage routes (the other is Spain's famous Camino de Santiago). This walk on the remote and mountainous Kii Peninsula is steeped in Buddhist history.

Staying in *ryokans* (Japanese inns) along the way offers a glimpse of traditional customs, hot springs and food. This hike can be done in five days but could easily stretch to more than 10, according to how much walking you do each day. →

Find inspiration for your next adventure with **Explore**





Kayaking in Telegraph Cove, Canada

Another option, and a slightly easier walk, is the Nakasendo trail that linked Kyoto to Tokyo during [Japan's](#) feudal period. This ancient route takes between five and 10 days, winding through traditional villages, ancient forests and castle towns.

4. Kayaking in Canada

The west coast of [Vancouver Island](#) is famed for its natural beauty and unspoiled waters. The Broughton Archipelago is the place to go if you'd like to paddle alongside wild orcas, or navigate your kayak through the cool waters of Nootka Island, where you might spot sea otters or humpback whales returning to their summer breeding grounds. You can find rest at sheltered coves, sea caves, creeks and beaches or rinse the surf away in freshwater waterfalls. Many of these areas are rich in the history of Indigenous peoples, such as Yuquot or 'Friendly Cove', thought to be the site of first contact between Europeans and First Nations People in British Columbia.

5. Boating in Central America

[Costa Rica](#) has long been known for environmentally conscious adventures and eco-lodges. There are endless ways to get around lightly, including cycling and trekking, but a boat trip along the Pacific coast from Costa Rica

A boat trip along the Pacific coast from Costa Rica to Panama offers a fresh perspective on this stunning part of the world.

to Panama offers a fresh perspective on this stunning part of the world.

National parks line the route, with the chance to see sloths, monkeys and tropical birds. Along Panama's Pacific coast, stop at Granito de Oro, a small volcanic island where you can see manta rays or hammerhead sharks while snorkeling.

Tours from your boat can include guided walks through the rainforest and excursions into indigenous villages.

6. Walking safari in Africa

In [Tanzania](#), you can hike in the grasslands of Serengeti National Park in wilderness zones where vehicles can't go. Light mobile camps accompany visitors on three- to four-day hikes with prime wildlife-viewing opportunities from rocky kopjes.

In [Kenya's](#) Laikipia County, wildlife abounds. Well-cared-for camels carry much of the gear between each campsite or there are daily walking safaris from a base camp. [South Africa's](#) Kruger National Park hosts short walking safaris and includes cultural experiences en route. Much has been done to advance the causes of wildlife conservation at Kruger, and there are a variety of eco-lodges and conservation-minded camps in which to stay.



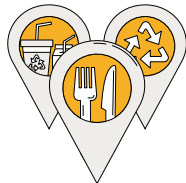
Lions at rest in Kenya



EATING & DRINKING

Tasting your way around a destination is one of the great pleasures of travel, but be sure what you put on your plate does no harm.

How to Eat Local (and Like a Local) When You Travel



Choosing to eat locally and to immerse yourself in local food traditions while traveling may seem like small potatoes, but the benefits are big and far-reaching, writes **Kasey Clark**.

Eating local is good for you as a traveler, for the communities you visit, and for our planet. Given that we've now faced this world-changing event – we're glaring at you, COVID-19 – supporting local producers, eateries and communities is more important than ever.

Think a 'dirty-water' hotdog from a cart on a busy street corner in New York City, a hawker armed with a small blowtorch searing some octopus at the Ningxia Night Market in Taipei. The textures of creamy camembert on a crisp-on-the-outside, soft-on-the-inside freshly baked baguette wrapped in wax paper as you stroll the Champs Élysées in Paris.

These are the moments that color your travel, titillate your tastebuds and make a mark on your memory. By eating at locally owned restaurants, visiting food stands, tasting unique street foods and strolling through (and sampling from) fresh-food markets, you not only get to enjoy new gastronomic experiences, you also communicate with the locals, learn what they're proud of (and know for) and take in the area's vibe.

Meet and eat with the locals

What's more, you'll gain an understanding of and appreciation for a region's customs, history and regional ingredients. It's even better when you can do this in the company of the locals themselves, who can share their knowledge, answer your questions, and maybe even become your friends.

But connecting with locals doesn't happen through a guide book. Instead, tap into your social networks for friends – or friends of friends – who've been



Soup served from a boat at a floating market in Thailand

These are the moments that color your travel, titillate your tastebuds and make a mark on your memory.

where you're going or, even better, know someone there. Ask them where to go to eat where the denizens eat – and the places to avoid to prevent a bout of gastro interrupting your travels!

Browse through websites such as eatwith.com, PlateCulture and BonAppetour, which are devoted to experiences that facilitate eating with locals. Share a meal, take a food tour with a local guide or book a traditional cooking class. Maybe cheese is your ultimate vice? Find a cheese-making class. Visit a winery's cellar door and indulge in a tasting – or six! – of this year's special vintage. Embrace the mud and participate in a rice harvest.

Make it up to Mother Earth

In addition to the culinary, cultural and personal benefits you reap from eating locally, our environment likewise stands to gain. The fewer food miles food travels, the better, because transport won't use as much fuel or →

generate as many greenhouse gases.

"The average item of food in America has traveled 1,500 miles (2,400km) from the farm to your plate," says Michael Pollan, food journalist and author of *In Defense of Food*. "It's burned up an incredible amount of fossil fuel just to get there... For the consumer to understand how much energy goes into their food, I think all they have to understand is, if it's local, it's less."

It's also better for you. Local food spends less time traveling from point A to point B, so it's naturally fresher, loses fewer nutrients in transit and sustains less spoilage.

Seize the seasonal

The same is true for eating seasonally on the road. "Fresh food tastes better when it's in season for two reasons," says Judy Davie, [The Food Coach](#) and author of *The Greengrocer's Diet*. "It hasn't been kept in storage for months, and it hasn't been sprayed, atmospherically controlled and packed to survive long-distance travel. The further food travels and the longer it is stored, the more flavor and nutrients are lost. It also costs more."

So, while you're on the road, find a local farmers' market if you can. You'll enrich your experience, save money and help local producers. And every season, there'll be something new to try. "Plus, aren't farmers' markets fun!" says Davie.

Do the farmers a favor

Pollan is on the farmers' bandwagon, too. "There are a great many other benefits to eating locally, besides conserving energy," he says. "There is the very important benefit of keeping farmers in business."

By buying local food when traveling and keeping that money in the area, you're supporting local farms and producers; enabling employment for farm workers and those in the local food-processing plants and distribution centers; and generally

Earth-friendly

The slow-food movement isn't just an at-home crusade; it's just as important when you're traveling. Having a slow-food mindset encourages you to connect with a place in a more sustainable way.

buoying the community's economy.

Also, if the region is trying to build an agritourism following, you're doing your part to help while you're there. Plus, your positive word of mouth post-visit can encourage more travelers to the area.

Travel the slow-food way

All these tips and practises illustrate that the slow-food movement isn't just an at-home crusade; it's just as important when you're traveling.

A slow-food mindset encourages travelers to connect with a new place in a more sustainable way.

The [Slow Food](#) Manifesto offers sage advice on how to keep this front of mind when you're eating on the road: "We can begin by ... advocating historical food culture and by defending old-fashioned food traditions".

Do some research on local dishes and what's in season, when. Avoid supermarkets and convenience stores, opting instead for your vacation spot's local and farmers' markets.

When you do dine out, avoid tourist traps and patronize local restaurants that showcase homegrown cuisine and are passionate about what they serve.

To end on another astute note from the Slow Food Manifesto: "Let us rediscover the rich varieties and aromas of local cuisines". Let us, indeed.



Fun at a food market in Morocco

The Rise of Zero-Waste Dining

As concern for our planet increases, restaurateurs, chefs and consumers are looking for ways to reduce food waste. It's no surprise, then, to see the global emergence of waste-free restaurants, writes **Kasey Clark**.

Thanks to eyebrow-raising data from the United Nations Environmental Programme, we know that humans waste approximately 1.3 billion tons of food every year. That's nearly a third of the food produced worldwide! And, roughly 40 per cent of that waste – particularly in the developed world – comes from restaurants and other food businesses.

Fortunately, these discouraging facts have spawned an encouraging and counteractive global trend: zero-waste restaurants.

Whittling away at waste

By using, consuming, recycling and donating everything in their establishments, no-waste restaurants and their teams are doing their part to reduce our landfills, helping to eliminate hunger, and, according to [a recent report](#), recouping their investment in food-waste reduction and even earning more money.

"As consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious, they want to support businesses that are doing the same," says chef Wayan Kresna Yasa of Bali's [Ijen](#), a zero-waste, line-caught seafood restaurant.

"People are caring about the planet more, and diners are interested to know they can help to reduce their own carbon footprint by eating at restaurants that follow a zero-waste philosophy."

These cutting-edge establishments have managed to eliminate all waste – from food and packaging to other disposable products such as napkins, paper plates and plastic cutlery.

For restaurants, going zero-waste is a daunting and ambitious task. Reaching zero-waste status involves meticulously



– and creatively – examining every aspect of the business, from food and menu planning to delivery and disposal options and even technology.

Despite its challenges, restaurants like Ijen and their teams are proving they can do it. With food, they're using every bit of the animal and vegetable. Think not only nose-to-tail, but also flesh-to-fin and roots-to-leaves dining.

"At Ijen, we use the fishbones for stock and the fish scales to make crackers, which are complimentary for guests upon being seated," says Kresna Yasa. "This allows us to minimize the fish waste and send the rest for animal feed or compost."

The end in mind

Zero-waste restaurants are carefully designing menus based on in-season ingredients and how they can make use of every piece; plus, they're often opting for set menus to ensure they don't over-order food. When there is leftover food, these →

Planet-friendly

Despite its challenges, restaurants are proving they can do it. With food, they're using every bit of the animal and vegetable. Think not only nose-to-tail, but also flesh-to-fin and roots-to-leaves.

Learn more about how to be a better traveler.

Responsible Travel →

restaurants are championing the resurgence of the (recyclable) doggie bag, or they're composting the waste to send home with customers for their gardens or giving it to local farmers.

"One of our biggest challenges was how to get rid of the hard shells from oysters and clams," says Kresna Yasa. "We had to get quite creative ... after talking to consultants, they advised us that chickens were generally calcium-deficient in Indonesia, so we started powdering the shells to add into chicken feed to increase the nutritional value."

As for deliveries, packaging and other waste-making items, no-waste dining means working with suppliers to change the packaging in which they deliver goods, eliminating one-time-use options and, in some cases, packaging altogether. Instead, restaurants and suppliers are looking to eco-friendly alternatives such as reusable wooden crates, leaves used to wrap herbs, and biodegradable containers.

Technology also plays a role, with software that can track which foods go to waste (so restaurants can better plan menus) and machines that do the composting.

Conscious eating out

Though by no means ubiquitous, these no-waste eateries are little by little popping up across the world.

Kresna Yasa hopes to keep the momentum going: "We have started an initiative with a group of chefs on the island to help lead by example and show them through our operations to inspire and support them in their own zero-waste quest".

Traveler preferences can amplify the incentive for eateries to make the transition. So, if Bali, New York, London, Brighton (UK), Helsinki or Berlin, for example, are on your upcoming itinerary, embrace the zero-waste zeitgeist and add one of these destinations' environmentally friendly eateries to your travel plans.



Why You Should Avoid Drinking Cat Poo Coffee

Civet coffee may seem harmless, but for the animals it can mean a lifetime of misery, writes Amy Jones.

In Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam and Indonesia, it's popular for travelers to buy a cup of civet coffee, also known as *kopi luwak*, made from coffee beans that have been partially digested and – ahem – ‘pooped’ out by civet cats.

The novelty lies in its expensive price tag and unique processing method: a single cup can cost up to \$80. Sounds strange, right? But what may sound like a quirky and harmless experience is actually causing a great deal of suffering to the animals involved.

How did civet coffee come about?

Civets are shy, solitary, nocturnal creatures with long tails and raccoon-like spots and stripes. Before the curiosity around civet coffee caught on, wild civets wandered freely around coffee plantations eating coffee cherries. Civets can't digest the bean of the cherry, so they'd excrete them out with the rest of their droppings. Farm workers would then collect and clean the beans to create *kopi luwak*. But, as demand for the coffee grew, the animals were poached from the wild and farmed.

What are civet coffee farms like?

On these civet coffee plantations, the animals are known to be kept in appalling conditions: they're confined to small wire cages and fed nothing but coffee beans rather than the diet of insects, fruit and small reptiles they eat in the wild. In part, the animals are kept in captivity for coffee production, but also for travelers who want to interact with them on farm tours.

Although wild-sourced coffee does exist, there is no way to tell whether the cup you buy has been made from wild or caged civets. Why not opt instead for a traditional Vietnamese coffee or Indonesian *kopie turbruk* at a fraction of the price, with none of the animal cruelty?

To Eat or Not to Eat?

Food can be a minefield for the responsible traveler. Follow this guide to help you decide what you should and shouldn't eat.



All sea turtle species are vulnerable or endangered

It's always better to err on the side of caution – and steer clear of endangered animals (and any restaurant serving them) at all costs.

There's no shame in trying different foods on the road – it's part of the joy of travel – but it's important to know which dishes or ingredients are ethical to eat and which should be avoided. Don't eat something if you're unsure where it came from – it's always better to err on the side of caution – and steer clear of endangered animals (and any restaurant serving them) at all costs.

Don't eat

Sea turtle meat and eggs

All seven species of sea turtles are vulnerable or endangered.

Found in: Indonesia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Cayman Islands.

Shark

Avoid shark-fin soup and fermented shark meat; many sharks are threatened or endangered.

Found in: South Africa, China, Malaysia, Iceland.

Tiger

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, tiger meat is believed to have medicinal properties. Tigers are endangered.

Found in: China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam.

Pangolin

Pangolin meat is considered a delicacy in some countries, while the scales are used to treat everything from asthma and kidney complaints to cancer.

Found in: China, Vietnam, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea.

Puffins

While puffin hunting is illegal in Norway, it's still carried out in other Nordic countries, where you will see it on some menus.

Found in: Finland, Iceland, Faroe Islands.

Civet coffee

Civet coffee – made from civet droppings – typically comes from farmed animals living in cruel conditions.

Found in: Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia. →



Those who consider cats to be companion animals rather than food will want to study their menus carefully.

Dog

While dogs are clearly not endangered, are you comfortable consuming an animal considered human's best friend in many countries?

Found in: Vietnam, Laos, China, South Korea, Nigeria.

Cat

Although Shenzhen became China's first city to ban eating cats in 2020, cat flesh is still widely consumed across the country. Those who consider cats to be companion animals rather than food will want to study their menus carefully.

Found in: Vietnam, Korea, China.

Bluefin tuna

Whether it's ethical to eat bluefin tuna depends on where it was caught. It is extinct in the Black Sea and endangered in the Atlantic.

Found in: Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia.

Seal

Seal is consumed in the Arctic Archipelago and is part of the indigenous Inuit diet. While seals aren't endangered, it can be hard to know how humanely the seal was killed.

Found in: Greenland, Canada, Japan, Norway, Iceland.

Bushmeat

Anything labeled 'bushmeat' in Africa should be viewed with suspicion. If there's no way for you to confirm the food hasn't come from an elephant, zebra, gorilla or other wildlife, avoid it.

Found in: Africa.

Whale

Most of us already have an aversion to whale hunting, but whale still finds its way onto menus – even endangered or protected species. Avoid *onami* in Japan or *hvalur* in Iceland; it's likely to be fin whale or minke whale meat.

Found in: Japan, Iceland, Greenland, Alaska, Norway.

Do eat

If your conscience allows, you might consider a dish containing these animals OK to eat.

Lionfish

Lionfish aren't native to the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea or Gulf of Mexico so the predatory fish wreak havoc on ecosystems – the reason they're spearfished and eaten.

Found in: Dominica, Venezuela, the US, the Bahamas.

Insects

Insects may be the future of sustainable animal protein so go ahead and give them a try. Witchetty grubs, crickets and cockroaches are all edible.

Found in: Australia, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Mexico.

Reindeer

Reindeer is a popular meal in Nordic countries, especially among the indigenous Sami population. Farmed reindeer are usually ethically raised.

Found in: Norway, Finland, Sweden.

Camel

Camels are usually farmed and reared just like cattle. Try camel milk or camel burgers.

Found in: Morocco, Somalia, India, Egypt, the UAE.

Kangaroo

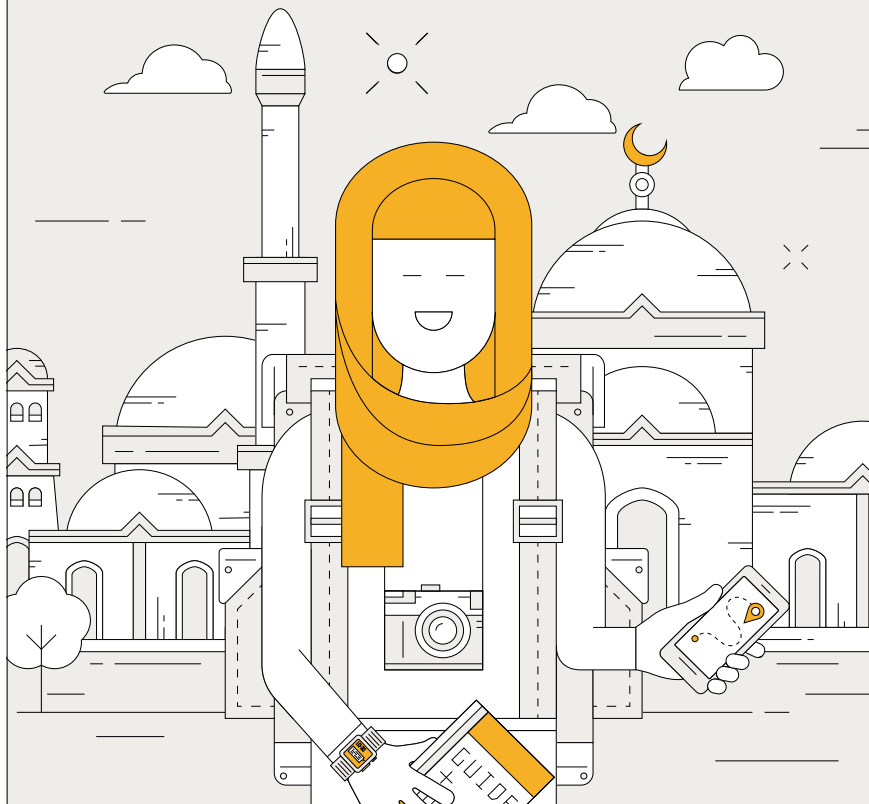
Kangaroo meat is harvested from wild populations and welfare standards are in place.

Found in: Australia.

Crocodile

Crocodile meat is seen by many as a byproduct, because crocodiles are farmed for their skin. Australia has a code of practice for their humane treatment.

Found in: Australia, Morocco, Somalia, India, Egypt, the UAE.



RESPECTFUL TRAVEL

Being polite, friendly and showing respect to all the people you meet on your travels doesn't cost a thing, and you'll be remembered for all the right reasons.

Contents

Travelling responsibly

Plan your trip

Pack your bags

Getting there & around

Eating & drinking

Respectful travel

Nature care

Giving back

Show a Little Kindness on Your Travels

How graciously you treat the workers you encounter when you travel – whether taxi drivers, hotel staff, porters or guides – speaks volumes about you and the country you come from, writes **Ivy Carruth**.



Getting to know the locals is sure to enrich your trip

Just because someone is 'working' for you, doesn't mean they don't deserve the same respect as the other locals you encounter.

The people we meet on our travels often make the difference between whether we love a destination or find it a bit ho-hum. Just as we love meeting kind and friendly locals, don't forget about the many tourism workers looking after us – serving us food, cleaning our room, guiding us, or driving us around.

Just because someone is 'working' for you, doesn't mean they don't deserve the same respect as the other locals you encounter. Here's a universal truth: everyone just wants to connect.

Prepare for success

Before you leave home, only pack what you need; think of the people who are potentially going to be schlepping your bags around for you

– a porter or a taxi driver, for example. Learn a few key phrases in the local language before you leave home too, especially how to say 'thank you'.

People love to feel seen; making an effort to speak their language is an easy way to achieve this and it doesn't cost a thing. Also, have appropriate amounts of cash on hand to leave tips for porters, housekeeping, drivers, servers and whomever else may help you. They rely on your generosity.

Stop and chat

Showing an interest in someone's local culture and community is an easy way to connect. Tamara Jacobi of [Tailwind Jungle Lodge](#) in the Mexican Pacific, says her staff appreciate it when guests engage them in conversation and "ask →

questions about their lives, practise their Spanish and ask for help with words and pronunciation". [Much Better Adventures](#) Director Sam Bruce agrees. "Ask about family and be genuinely interested, it helps break down barriers," he says.

Be a good guest

Jessica Blotter knows a thing or two about kindness. As the CEO of socially conscious hotel-booking platform [Kind Traveler](#), her company is built around creating mutually beneficial travel experiences. She suggests something all of us can do: "maintain a well-kept room. It's basic human kindness to clean up after yourself". Tidy up, put things in the proper bin and keep towels off the floor unless making it clear you need them laundered.

Acknowledge good service

Giving a compliment, both directly to the person who helped you as well as to management, can make someone's day. Compliments are also terrific conversation starters, and research shows that receiving praise lights up the same part of the brain as monetary rewards.

By all means, tip away, particularly in countries where hospitality staff rely on them to earn a decent income, but don't forget the human aspect of direct communication. For those who really want to go the extra mile, Blotter suggests leaving a thoughtful thank-you note for housekeeping staff in addition to your tip.

If someone you've met on your trip has enhanced your experience, be sure to name names and give credit where credit's due on review platforms such as [TripAdvisor](#) – it could be the best thank you they have received all year.

Leave something behind

It's a sad reality that many people lack access to basic necessities, particularly in the developing world.

Although it's important to pack lightly, Bruce recommends bringing one or two extras you can leave behind; things



A heartfelt thank-you costs nothing but can mean a lot.

like personal hygiene products, school supplies, flashlights or batteries.

Jacobi says her staff members treasure small token gifts such as maple syrup (very exotic in the jungles of Mexico) and that one worker collects Canadian five-dollar bills because he's crazy about the color! Travelers have also been known to bring and leave essential first-aid products and veterinary medicines.

Use social media

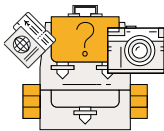
Bruce also suggests staying in touch with staff you've enjoyed connecting with via social media – if that person ever comes to your part of the world, you may have the chance to show them some of the same hospitality they showed you.

Take the time to leave reviews for great service and tag businesses on your Facebook or Instagram posts when you share your experiences with friends and followers. "Word of mouth is so valuable in travel," Bruce says.

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THANKS

Dark Tourism Destinations

Visiting a site of inhumanity can be a deeply moving experience but remembering what happened and why is essential so we can prevent it from happening again, writes **Kate Duthie**.



Question time

The key to any visit to a dark tourism destination is intent – hopefully, a desire to pay respects to the dead and to learn from what happened there. Ask yourself why you want to visit a particular site: are you traveling to a place to heighten your understanding, or simply to show-off or indulge some morbid curiosity?

When you visit a site such as Cape Town's [Robben Island](#), the Killing Fields of Cambodia, [Hỏa Lò Prison](#) in Hanoi, or [Anne Frank's house](#) in Amsterdam, you are engaging in dark tourism. And you're not alone. The [Auschwitz Birkenau Concentration Camp](#) accepts more than 1.5 million visitors a year, and it's almost a given that you'll go to the [9/11 Memorial](#) during a visit to New York City.

The key to any visit to a dark tourism destination is intent – hopefully, a desire to pay respects to the dead and to learn from what happened there. By avoiding these signposts of past wrongs, we can hopefully prevent them from being repeated.

"We *should* be visiting these sites," says travel writer Kendall Hill. "To remind us of the events that led up to, for example, the Holocaust, and how to prevent that happening again.

We can't be responsible custodians of the future without understanding our past. And one could argue, with the world now hostage to several despots, it's more important than ever to be armed with that knowledge and be vigilant. Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it."

Positives and negatives

In Hill's view, tourism is one of the strongest forces to help devastated communities earn income and get back on their feet.

Many countries have benefitted from tourism after trauma including Rwanda, Mozambique, and [Cambodia](#). When visiting [Croatia](#), it's hard to believe a civil war took place there just 20 years ago, so successful is its tourism industry.

There are benefits for travelers, too. Visiting the sites of atrocities gives us more of an understanding →

than reading about it in a book ever could. "What I remember most about the time I spent in Warsaw's WWII-era Jewish ghetto," says *National Geographic* writer Robert Reid, "is a fellow visitor, a white-haired man who, when I noticed the number tattooed on his arm, acknowledged my silent inquiry with a nod. The experience made history more real for me".

For travel editor Sarah-Kate Lynch, one of the positives of dark tourism is being able to make a connection to the past, in particular during a visit to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin.

"Instagram wasn't invented when I went," she explains, "but this memorial is not a place to smile and take selfies. I found it moving and sad, and it made the horrific history of what happened, exactly where I was standing, mean something more to me. Understanding humanity, good or bad, is what travel is all about".

But there can be negative aspects to dark tourism, too. Look out for sites being run purely for profit rather than to educate, or tour operators and museums that are insensitively sharing the view of both the victims and the perpetrators.

What to ask before you go

Ask yourself why you want to visit a particular site; are you traveling to a place to heighten your understanding, or simply to show-off or indulge some morbid curiosity?

Do you want to gawp, or remember and build your understanding of what took place and why? What is your intent?

If going on a guided tour, research ethical or non-profit tour companies, and seek out those that give something worthwhile back to the communities or the place you are visiting.

Make sure the site is genuinely respectful to the people who lost their lives, and that visitors are encouraged to behave appropriately.



Travel warning: Joanna Tovia

When Tourism is Terrible

Most travelers bound for foreign lands do so with positive intentions, but others cause real harm.

Poverty tourism

Visiting a slum on your travels can be an eye-opening experience, but for the people living there, poverty is no joke. Also known as *favelas*, shantytowns, *barrios* and ghettos, the impoverished areas of Mumbai, Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro and other major cities can be visited on organised tours that turn impoverished people struggling to get by into a spectacle. Put yourself in their shoes – would you want to be gawked at and photographed?

Sex tourism

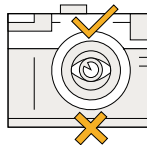
Prostitution is rarely a choice for the women and men working in the sex industry – and never is for underage boys and girls caught up in it. Travelers paying for sex overseas create demand, and that leads to the exploitation of society's most vulnerable people. The sex trafficking, enslavement and abuse of children is reason enough not to engage in any part of the sex industry while traveling – and is not just a moral choice, it's illegal.

Cocaine tourism

[Buying cocaine](#) in South America and elsewhere has become popular among cashed-up Australian, American and English travelers because the drug can be bought at a fraction of the price as back home. But behind the scenes lies corruption, bloodshed and habitat destruction. In Colombia alone, the drug war has killed hundreds of thousands of people, caused millions to leave their homes in search of safety, and has wreaked havoc on the economy and the environment. Consider the bigger picture before contributing to the problem.

Keep in mind that any illegal activities you do decide to take part in will likely void your travel insurance – most policies don't cover events arising from illegal acts.

Snap Happy: How to Take Photos Responsibly



Taking and sharing photos on your travels may make your trip more fun, but it's important to follow some simple rules, writes **Cassandra Brooklyn**.

Part of the joy of traveling is being able to capture and share the delights of a destination through photography. Adopting some basic picture-taking etiquette and avoiding taboo subjects will ensure you're doing the right thing by the people and places you encounter.

Geotagging smarts

Unless you turn off location tracking on your smart phone and social media platforms, the exact spot you shot a photo is accessible to all. Known as geotagging, pinpointing a location has wider reaching impacts than simply informing your social media followers of where the picture was taken.

Once peaceful places can soon become overrun with travelers, all seeking to recreate the beautiful photos they saw online. Not only can these crowds damage fragile ecosystems, geotagging can also alert poachers to the exact location of rhinoceros, elephants, and other at-risk animals. If you want to tag a location on social media, simply tag the country or general region instead of geotagging the specific site and disable location access for your phone's camera.

Animals and wildlife

This one is simple: if you want to photograph an animal, let it come to you. Don't bait animals with food, and don't chase after them. Not only can approaching a wild animal be dangerous but feeding them could cause them to become dependent on humans for food, which has broader



Ask permission before taking photos where possible

Keep kids safe

Once we post a picture online, we have no control of how the image may be used by others. To avoid the possibility of children's photos being used inappropriately online or drawing attention to the location of groups of vulnerable children, it's best not to take the photo to begin with.

environmental implications.

Animal selfies are so harmful (and dangerous) that Costa Rica has launched an adorable [Stop Animal Selfies](#) social media campaign to raise awareness on the topic.

If you want to capture photos of animals in their natural habitat, it's best to go with an expert, and no, the operators of exotic animal zoos, elephant rides, and fake tiger 'sanctuaries' don't count.

Burials and funerals

Before taking a picture of a funeral or burial when traveling, ask yourself how you would feel if the shoe was on the other foot. How would you feel if a bystander decided to 'snap a quick pic' of your loved one's funeral because they found the experience interesting? Odds are, you'd be appalled.

If the burial process is part of a unique cultural tradition, such as Buddhist sky burials or India's fiery *ghat* funerals, →

and you're genuinely interested in learning more about it, then ask local people about the tradition, stop into a tourist information center, or read about it when you get home. Taking a photo of a private, sacred event won't teach you much but it could easily, and profoundly, offend those around you and anyone who may see the photo online later.

Protecting children

When in travel mode, many of us get caught up in the thrill of the moment and may not think twice about snapping a picture of a cute local child. They may be part of the special moment we're experiencing and want to remember. As innocent as this may seem, imagine someone coming up to your child, grandchild or niece, snapping their photo and walking off. Such a practice would be shunned in our own countries – and may even result in a fist fight – yet we somehow condone it when we're in another country.

Once we post a picture online, we have no control of how the image may be used by others.

To avoid the possibility of children's photos being used inappropriately online or drawing attention to the location of groups of vulnerable children, it's best not to take the photo to begin with.

If an adult is with the child and agrees to have their photo taken, it may be ethical to take the photo, but be thoughtful about how you share it, if at all.

According to responsible travel advocate, [Tourism Cares](#), travelers should never ask children to pose for photographs in exchange for money, food or gifts, as this can perpetuate negative behaviors and have unintended negative consequences. Tourism Cares also stresses to never take photos of children in distress or when they are partially dressed.

Street photography

The best people shots usually come about when you interact with your subjects, plain and simple. Never sneak pictures of people without their knowing. Ask permission, and if the answer is "no", respect that.

If you do take someone's picture, show them the shots and, if possible, offer to email them later.

Be mindful that many of the sites where travelers take pictures of people, such as bustling outdoor markets, are not just gorgeous backdrops, they are the sites of countless people's livelihoods. Taking a picture of shopkeeper with a weathered face or a fruit vendor in a beautiful dress does not help them put food on the table for their families.

Paying for photos can cause its own set of problems – faking culture, encouraging begging, altering the relationship between locals and visitors – but a case can be made if you're a customer. If you like how that spice vendor looks in front of brightly colored bags of turmeric and paprika, then buy some spices, exchange some smiles and a few words, then ask to take a picture of him or her with the spices.

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Locals on the go in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Visiting Sites of Significance

Rachel Shue investigates how to explore important religious, cultural and historical places and events without offending the locals.

When you travel, you're effectively visiting someone else's home. Just as you appreciate guests being mindful of how you do things at your house, the same is true when you visit countries with cultures that differ from your own. It pays to observe and listen first and then adapt, no matter what you're accustomed to doing back home.

Hossam Moussa, a former guide for Intrepid Travel in Egypt, says: "It doesn't matter what you think is right or wrong. It's about their traditions, culture and what is OK from their perspective".

Tolerant travel

Moussa suggests travelers change their mindset and travel with a sense of wonder, looking at everything as if it were new. "Be ready to get out of your comfort zone and expand your personal horizons a little," he says. "Think of your destination as a place full of mystery waiting for you to explore. Think from their perspective, not yours."

Respect often fosters respect in return and will help you connect with locals in a meaningful way. When locals understand by your actions that you mean well and are trying to understand cultural norms, they will often open up and help you, or even show you insights into their lives.

Do some research ahead of your departure, especially if you're not joining an organized tour. Learn about the sites, rituals and festivals you want to see – some can be confronting, so be realistic about what you may or may not be able to cope with.

World Expeditions Responsible Travel Manager Donna Lawrence recommends that travelers consider



the kinds of cultural challenges they could encounter before departing.

"We use the term 'thoughtful travel' because we believe that to travel responsibly requires all travelers to think before they act. Sometimes what is perfectly acceptable in our culture can be highly offensive in others," she says.

Consider asking a local tour guide to explain what you should (and shouldn't) do, and why. If you don't agree with the advice or can't accept what the locals do, it may be best to simply not visit.

Once on the road, keep an open mind and take the time to understand the culture of the place you're visiting. This may mean spending longer in one place than you'd planned, wandering off the beaten track, and engaging with people you meet. Sharing a moment with a local is likely to be far more memorable than taking photos of them from afar.

Religious sites and festivals

Many of the world's most famous monuments and sites have profound religious and cultural significance. Remember that temples, churches, →

"It doesn't matter what you think is right or wrong. It's about their traditions, culture and what is okay from their perspective."

mosques and synagogues are for the believers of these faiths and religions, first and foremost. Tourists who visit them are guests. Find out as much as you can about the rules to follow before visiting to avoid unwittingly offending someone or accidentally being disruptive.

Eating or drinking in and around religious and historical sites is disrespectful, and responsible travelers will have already researched whether they need to cover their arms, heads and legs.

Body language can be especially problematic. Sitting with your feet pointed at someone in Southeast Asia is a no-no, while in other countries sitting cross-legged or showing the soles of your feet or shoes is considered an affront.

Gender norms can also be tricky to navigate. In some countries, it's common to segregate males and females at some religious sites, and clothing requirements may vary between the sexes. Follow their lead, imitate how they dress and go where they go – without internal judgment if you can.

Rituals and ceremonies

Many customs and rituals are off-limits to travelers without special permission and only under strict conditions.

Ceremonies related to birth, initiation or coming of age, marriage and religious rituals are all culturally significant events. Initiation ceremonies in indigenous societies in Australia and among the Xhosa in Eastern Cape, South Africa, for instance, are often secret and considered sacred.

If you're lucky enough to be invited to attend any kind of sacred ceremony, listening with care to what your host advises you on local customs and protocol will allow you to more successfully blend in.

Especially sensitive are rituals to do with death. The Towers of Silence are



sites where Zoroastrians leave human corpses to be eaten by vultures and decompose in the open air. Among the most well-known are those found in Yazd, Iran, and Mumbai, India.

Buddhist sky rituals are ceremonies for the recently deceased and also involve leaving human remains for birds of prey to scavenge. Unfortunately, travelers have been seeking out sky rituals in Tibet in recent years, turning a long-held tradition into a spectacle to be shared online.

In Varanasi, two famous *ghats* (sets of riverside steps) have been used as cremation sites for centuries, and around 100 bodies are still cremated there today. Varanasi is one of the holiest cities in India. At these sites, it's best to simply keep a respectful distance and observe rather than taking photos.

Immersing yourself in a new culture is often an exhilarating – and sometimes challenging – experience. Slow down, be curious and deeply listen without judgment. Err on the side of caution if you are worried about causing offense. And, if you're still concerned you might be doing something wrong, a warm and apologetic smile could go a long way.



Learn about local customs before setting out

How to Avoid Making an Embarrassing Cultural Gaffe

Traveling often involves negotiating unfamiliar cultural customs. Craig Tansley reveals how to avoid the worst social faux pas committed by unwitting travelers.

It may seem like there are a lot of rules to be mindful of when you travel, but adhering to cultural niceties isn't all about restrictions. Traveling sets you free, too. In [China](#), it's considered a compliment to belch after a good meal, and in many Southeast Asian countries (even Japan), noisily slurping noodles and broths is encouraged to show you're enjoying the food.

Such freedoms aside, if you'd prefer to make friends rather than cause offense, some rules are best followed when you're on the road.

Avoid a fine (or even jail)

- Some cultural rules are laws. Pay special attention to cultural rules that carry prison sentences (or fines).
- Reconsider kissing your partner in many countries in the Middle East (and India), such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), or drinking alcohol.
- In Thailand, don't make any jokes about the Thai royal family; even stepping on Thai currency is a criminal act (notes and coins bear the king's head).
- Chewing gum in Singapore carries fines of more than US\$2,000.
- Wearing camouflage-style clothes in the Caribbean, (also the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Zambia and Zimbabwe) carries a stiff fine.
- Don't urinate into the sea in Portugal. You've been warned.
- It's illegal to leave the house without underwear in Thailand. Darn.
- If the possibility of fines or prison isn't enough of a disincentive, be aware that it may also void any travel insurance you have, as most policies do not cover events arising from illegal acts.



Following the rules is a sign of respect

Polite eating

This area of travel offers you the greatest potential to mess up, so pay attention: there are numerous etiquette rules to remember! Here goes:

- Don't use your hands to eat in Chile or Italy (unless it's take-out).
- In Sweden, if you tell your server you're full they'll think you didn't like the food (*ful* means ugly).
- Don't split the bill in France – offer to pay or someone else will.
- Eat only with your right hand in India, Bangladesh, most of Africa, and Middle Eastern countries (the left hand is for... less savory purposes involving the toilet).
- Finish your meal in India, otherwise it's considered disrespectful; but in China leave a little bit on your plate to show your host you were given more than enough.
- Don't ask for chopsticks for rice dishes in Thailand. Although chopsticks can be used for noodle dishes, a fork and spoon is the usual set-up for dishes containing or accompanying rice. →

It's illegal to leave the house without underwear in Thailand. Darn.

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Be polite in Japan

Japan has its own category of etiquette rules. It pays to be mindful of them to avoid drawing attention to yourself or causing offense.

- Don't hug in public.
- Don't talk on your phone on trains or buses (or to each other, unless in a whisper).
- Don't blow your nose in public.
- Don't eat while you're walking along or when you're on public transport (unless you're on a Shinkansen train; there's a fold-down tray for the purpose).
- Don't hand cash to staff in restaurants or convenience stores; use the plastic tray on the counter.
- Remove your shoes before entering a restaurant or a local's home.
- Don't cross your chopsticks or stand them upright in your bowl (it's considered an offering to the dead).
- Don't pour your own drink or attempt to open your own taxi door (they're controlled by the driver).

And the most surprising rules

These little-known social gaffes are well worth avoiding.

- Don't flush the toilet after 10pm in Switzerland (the noise might wake the neighbors).
- Don't affectionately rub a child's head in Thailand (Buddhists consider the head the holiest part of the body).
- Don't show the soles of your feet throughout Southeast Asia when sitting down – they are considered unclean.
- Don't give a thumbs-up sign in the Middle East, Germany or West Africa (it refers to where you want to stick your thumb).
- Don't say 'hiya' in Turkey (unless you actually meant to say 'testicles?').
- Keeping your clothes on is usually wise when you're around other people – unless you're in a Turkish *hammam*, Japanese *onsen*, or Scandinavian sauna. Leave your modesty (and your clothes) behind.



On the road: Cassandra Brooklyn

Tips on Tipping

Being generous with your cash helps local workers earn the fair wage they need.

Travelers from the US, Canada and other countries may be well used to tipping every time they eat out, get a haircut or exit a cab. But for those who hail from elsewhere across the globe, tipping may be less familiar – and come to mind less often as something you should do on the road.

It helps to remember that many vendors and service-industry employees you'll encounter may have few other employment options available to them and rely on the money they receive from travelers to get by. Generous tipping gives us an opportunity to help ensure they earn a fair wage.

Wages in the tourism industry are often set low intentionally, with the expectation that travelers will offer cash tips. Even if your own country has no tipping culture, you should still tip abroad, particularly in developing countries, where hourly wages are too low for families to survive on. Restaurant workers, tour guides, porters, housekeeping and hotel staff, bartenders, restroom attendants, and hairstylists/barbers should be tipped abroad even if these positions don't rely on tips in your home country.

How much to tip

Don't assume everyone wants to be tipped in US dollars or your own currency. In some countries, exchanging currencies can be a hassle, or impossible. Do a little research before you leave home on how much to tip – if at all.

In Japan and South Korea, tipping is not required (and can even be considered rude), while people in other countries will not expect to be tipped (but will appreciate it).

If in doubt, leave 10-15 percent, but do check your bill before handing over your cash. In many South American and European countries, a service charge will already have been added.

Responsible Shopping

We all like bringing home treasures from our travels, but be sure they're ethical and sustainable first, advises **Craig Tansley**.

A good souvenir is a travel memento we cherish for years to come, but a bad one can mean you're doing something as shocking as supporting the poaching of an endangered species. But spending your travel dollars on ethical and sustainable keepsakes made by locals will help the communities of the country you're visiting, provided you're smart about what you buy and who you buy it from.

Why it's important to buy local

If you buy your souvenirs direct from the person who makes them, you know the money will go straight to them, to be distributed back through the local community's economy. Make the effort to get as close to the source of production of the souvenir as you can and talk with the person making it.

While buying local is great in itself, there's more to it: ask how a souvenir is made, and whether the materials it's made from are sustainable.

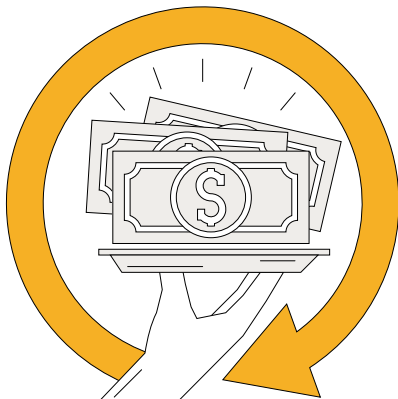
Can you be certain that it's definitely made locally? Is there more benefit to you buying this product than not? If there's even a chance that there's not, walk away.

Ask yourself (and be honest): does the souvenir help you support the local community and learn more about it, or will it just look pretty on your wall at the local community's expense?

Buy local, enhance your trip

Shopping responsibly is as important as behaving responsibly when we travel. But it also can be a lot of fun.

Bazaars and markets are often some of most interesting places to visit when you travel. It's here you'll find weavers, carvers and other



artisan producers, often making the product right in front of you.

Chatting and finding out more about them and their work can be a great way to integrate into the local community, and bartering can be a fun way to engage in conversation (but know the rules of the country you're in: some countries, like Thailand, encourage good-natured bartering, while other countries find it offensive).

If you're lucky enough to have a language in common, you'll get to hear the stories behind your souvenir – how it's made, how long it takes, how long the artisan has been doing it, and whether their parents or grandparents passed down the craft.

Conversations like these provide a fascinating insight into a region or country. If you can, opt for one-off, handmade trinkets over bulk products, and let the maker know their creation is valued and going to a good home. →

Ask yourself: is there more benefit to you buying this product for the local community than not? If there's even a chance that there's not, walk away.



Cape Town, South Africa

What to buy – and what not to buy

- Buy handmade treasures that will last, not cheap imported goods.
- Look for products that involve the use of skills unique to that destination.
- Choose something that will mean something to you for a long time, not be thrown out in your next spring clean.
- Seek out Fair Trade items where you can. The [World Fair Trade Organization](#) mandates that Fair Trade goods are made by adults who are treated well and paid a fair wage, and that production is environmentally sustainable.
- Avoid souvenirs made with animal products, especially endangered animals. You'd be surprised how much ivory is out there – don't buy it, and don't fall for the 'mammoth tusk' label sometimes given to ivory. Don't buy any products made with skin, fur, bone, shell, beaks or hooves.
- Skip souvenirs derived from monuments or ancient ruins – you don't really need an actual piece of history, do you? Take a photo instead.
- Turtle shells are for sale throughout Asia, in everything from hair clips to bracelets, but they are likely to have come from critically endangered hawksbill turtles.
- Don't buy coral or seashells, bird feathers, snake wine (the snake is often put in alive) and, if you're buying herbal medicine, make sure it's plant-based.

On the road: Cassandra Brooklyn

Ethical Haggling

Everyone loves a bargain but be sure to negotiate with fairness in mind.

Negotiating with a shopkeeper can be a fun travel experience, but don't waste a vendor's time just so you can play the haggling game. Do so only if you intend to buy something.

In most countries, although haggling is accepted, you're also expected to pay a higher price than locals. Keep in mind that the few extra dollars you may be able to shave off a souvenir would mean exponentially more to a vendor than it would to you.

If a shopkeeper offers a t-shirt for \$2 that you'd pay \$20 for at home, do you really need to bargain another 30 cents off the price? A fair price is not always the cheapest price and the extra money you pay a stall holder could make a big difference to their family's wellbeing.

Nobody wants to get ripped off either so shop around to get a sense of what the price should be before buying.

When to haggle – and when not to

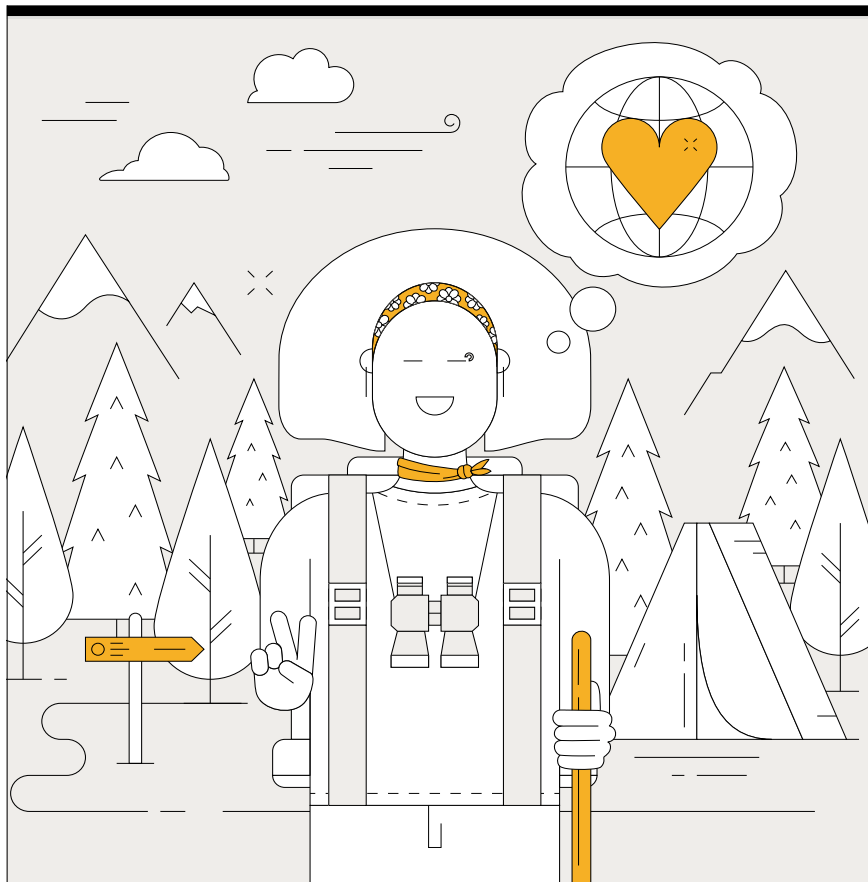
Haggling rules and etiquette vary across cultures. In Egypt, for example, anything without a written price tag is fair game. In neighboring Jordan, however, customs are a bit more nuanced. Do your research before you leave home and if there are clear price tags or a sign stating that the prices are fixed, avoid haggling. Elizabeth Palacios, a guide in Mexico City, says "just because some countries haggle doesn't mean it's acceptable here". She instructs participants on her tours to pay whatever price the vendor offers, noting that "sellers get upset when people haggle because their work is not being valued".

Five responsible ways to get a fair deal

1. If you have a particular souvenir in mind, ask your host, tour guide, or a local friend what a fair price is
2. Visit several shops to check the going rate for an item
3. If a vendor offers a price you believe is reasonable, then there's no reason to haggle
4. If the price seems too high, offer just below the lowest price you found in another store. The vendor will likely meet you in the middle, at a fair price for both of you.
5. If you still find the price unreasonably high, walk away. If the shopkeeper is able to lower it further, don't worry – they'll chase after you.

Will my travel insurance cover me if I buy something illegal?

Wildlife, ivory, religious artefacts – these are just some of the things that may be illegal for you to buy and bring home. If the possibility of fines, prison or worse aren't enough to deter you, be aware that purchases like these may also void any travel insurance cover you have as most policies do not cover events arising from illegal acts. Additionally, many policies don't cover the loss of your belongings if they are confiscated or destroyed by customs or other officials.



CARING FOR THE NATURAL WORLD

Sustainable and regenerative travel has never been more important. Whether hiking, wildlife spotting, or sharing your adventures on social media, do it responsibly and with the future in mind.

Let's Keep it Pristine

Cassandra Brooklyn discovers how to care for the planet when you're camping, hiking, snorkeling and snowshoeing around the world.

Before heading into the great outdoors, take care of the basics: bring a plastic bag to collect your trash and have a plan in place for how you'll go to the bathroom if a location lacks facilities. When possible, use gear you already own or purchase second-hand. If you need to purchase new equipment for a trip, invest in well-made gear that will last.

Hiking

Hiking allows us to experience nature on a more personal level so you may be tempted to skip the main trail and 'forge your own path'. Keep in mind that getting off-the-beaten path figuratively doesn't mean that you should be wandering off the path literally. Trails exist for a reason and responsible travelers should stay on designated trails to avoid getting lost or damaging the surrounding environment. If everyone went their own way, the forest would become a trampled web of mini trails.

It should go without saying that any trash that's brought in should be taken out. It's possible to hike long distances before coming across a park-managed garbage bin so consider how the products you bring in could reduce the amount of trash you'll need to carry out. Opt for lightweight silicone dishes, bamboo cutlery, and handheld water filters such as [Grayl](#) or [Lifestraw](#).

Camping

Though loud, crowded campsites may not be ideal, they may be your only option if you're camping within popular national parks during peak season. Tents can disturb vegetation and animal habitats the same way that hiking off-trail does so if you're in a



Camping in Manigod, France

campsite, stay within the designated camp area. If you're wild camping, be sure to move your tent every few days so grass underneath can recover.

If you're going to cook while camping, use existing fire pits, keep the area free of flammable debris, and only use dead branches or wood that's fallen to the ground on its own. Never chop down healthy trees for firewood.

Respect fire danger warnings and note that some parks may not allow fires during dry summer months. [Parks Canada](#) also discourages visitors from bringing their own firewood from home, as doing so can "inadvertently introduce invasive species and have lasting impacts on the landscape".

If you have dishes to wash, make the effort to use a bucket to bring water to your campsite. Never wash dishes (or clothing) in the water source. Even the most eco-friendly, biodegradable soaps weren't intended to be poured directly into lakes and streams. →

Stay on track

Hiking knowhow

Keep in mind that getting off-the-beaten path figuratively doesn't mean that you should be wandering off the path literally. Stay on designated trails to avoid getting lost or damaging the surrounding environment.

Skiing and snowshoeing

Skiers, snowshoers and winter hikers should follow the same principles as warmer-weather trekkers: stick to approved areas, follow the rules, and take out what you bring in. The snow may hide garbage in the winter, but it will melt eventually.

During winter months, many areas have designated trails specific to skiers, snowshoers, and hikers.

According to Timothy Carlson, Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician, this is as much of a safety measure, as it is a convenience factor. "Skis can get caught on dips created by snowshoers' tracks, causing accidents." He suggests that each group sticks to its own tracks and study maps and guidebooks before heading out to ensure they're traveling on the right trails.

Leave an itinerary with family or friends, and carry and know how to use an avalanche beacon, probe and shovel. Anyone heading into the backcountry in winter would also be wise to take an avalanche preparedness class.

Snorkeling and scuba diving

[Good Life Divers](#) instructor Danny Rivera says being a responsible diver starts well before the actual dive. "Check reviews of the operators to make sure they use best practices to limit the impact of their operation on the environment, wildlife, and underwater landscape." Green Fins members pledge to adhere to a strict environmental code of conduct that includes participating in coral reef monitoring and ocean clean-ups.

Ask operators if dive sites are accessible by swimming from the beach to avoid polluting the water with boat fuel. Once on the dive, wear reef-safe sunscreen and avoid contact with the bottom and with sensitive corals. Rivera suggests not wearing gloves unless they're needed for thermal protection, as they promote the touching of marine life and coral.



Waste management

Though it may seem harmless to toss a banana peel into the bushes, if that 'organic waste' isn't native to the area, it could be considered an invasive species and, over time, alter the local ecology. In some areas, organic waste could attract the attention of animals, who may become reliant on scavenging instead of doing what they normally do, gathering their own food. When exploring pristine natural areas such as Antarctica and Patagonia, it's especially important to avoid contaminating the environment with foreign seeds.

Poop like a pro

While we're on the topic of waste management, consider how the good ol' 'leave no trace' adage also refers to human waste. Packing your waste to carry out with you is the best option (odor-neutralizing 'go anywhere' poop bags are even a thing).

If you didn't pack proper poop paraphernalia, your next best bet is digging a 6-8 inch (15-20cm) 'cat-hole' at least 200 feet (60m) from your camp and any trails or water sources. Be sure to carry out all used toilet paper with you, which can easily be stored in a low-tech, re-sealable plastic bag. Should human's best friend be joining you on a hike, pack up his/her poop to carry out as well.



Green Fins members follow a strict code of conduct

Give National Parks a Break

Why rethinking the way we visit well-trodden natural wonders will do the planet – and you – a big favor, writes **Cassandra Brooklyn**.



Crisis-level overcrowding in US national parks, and other naturally beautiful places around the world, is taking its toll. With countless stunning landscapes and vistas to be enjoyed across the planet, however, there's no need to rush to destinations at the top of most-popular and must-visit travel roundups. Instead, give nature a break and get off the beaten path.

What causes the overcrowding

From flexible work schedules and location-independent careers to an ever-growing number of booking platforms for accommodation, tours and transportation, travel has become easier than ever. Add in services such as house and pet sitting, and home swapping, and it's no surprise that the number of people traveling is growing each year.

For many travelers, visiting and enjoying a destination is no longer enough; if it's not on social media, it

didn't happen. Geotagging – using GPS to share the precise location where a photo was taken – has only intensified the problem. Instagram influencers, in particular, have contributed to overtourism, albeit unintentionally. By tagging the location of a beautiful, formerly remote location, their followers are encouraged to visit and capture the same shot themselves.

At Horseshoe Bend in Arizona, visitor numbers have jumped from 100,000 in 2010, the year Instagram launched, to 2 million in 2018. Geotagging has become such a problem in Wyoming that the Jackson Hole Travel & Tourism Board has asked visitors to stop doing it. In Iceland, overtourism got so out of control at Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon (the site of a 2015 Justin Bieber music video) that it closed to foot traffic in 2019, the same year Thailand closed Maya Bay (which featured in a Leonardo DiCaprio film) to tourists to allow coral reefs to recover. →

Crisis-level overcrowding in US national parks, and other naturally beautiful places around the world, is taking its toll.



Exploring wild destinations

Venturing to off-the-beaten track destinations can be rewarding. In the US, consider hiking and camping in state parks, which tend to receive less attention and fewer visitors than national parks. If you prefer to have someone else handle the details, look for small-group tours and guided hikes in lesser-visited destinations.

Jaime Eder, of [Travel Oregon](#), believes that by dispersing visitation to lesser-visited natural spaces, pristine surroundings remain intact and economic impact is spread to all corners of a state or region. Eder also notes that while wilder destinations may be appealing, they may lack the infrastructure to support visitors who aren't prepared to rough it.

If you want to visit wild destinations that lack visitor infrastructure, consider hiring a local guide who knows the area well and can handle important details such as gear, first aid, extreme weather, and navigation. Expert guides can lead hikers to less-traversed routes without venturing off-trail and causing erosion. Platforms such as [57Hours](#), which connects individuals with certified guides for outdoor experiences such as hiking, skiing, surfing, and rock climbing, can be a great resource for travelers looking for a bit more adventure.

If you want to visit one of the world's most popular national parks, plan your visit during the uncrowded off-season and spend your time in lesser-visited corners of the park.

Banff National Park in Canada, for example, receives the vast majority of its visitors during the summer, when parking lots are crowded by 8am. To enjoy the park with fewer people, visit during shoulder season, October, November, and May, when reduced opportunities to hike and ski mean the park is a lot quieter but no less beautiful. While there, be sure to visit its three neighboring national parks that receive far fewer visitors.



On the road: Sam van Egmond

Responsible Social Media

How to share your travels wisely with the world

A desire to discover, document and share our travels is nothing new, but a steep rise in Instagram 'influencers' posting pristine vistas has taken social media-fueled travel to the next level. Little wonder tourism boards are employing Instagrammers with thousands – and even millions – of followers as marketing tools.

While we're all for sharing our scenic snaps, there's a growing concern that geotagging photos – adding an exact location – is fueling overtourism, especially to places ill-equipped to handle a sudden increase in visitors.

Using social media for good

Social media isn't all bad – used responsibly, it can work wonders; we can all do our part to make sure our social media use doesn't negatively impact the people and places we visit, and even make a positive contribution. Creating an online platform to mindfully share, inform and inspire fellow travelers can encourage others to enjoy and appreciate new experiences and cultures. It can also provide an opportunity to shine a spotlight on significant issues that need our attention around the world, including environmental conservation and social initiatives.

Dos and don'ts

- Skip Instagram hotspots. Explore further afield, inspiring others to broaden their perceptions of a country and its people.
- Don't attempt dangerous stunts in an effort to recreate an image or to impress your followers. This puts your safety at risk, and that of others.
- Be honest with your intentions. Are you posting to share a special memory, or to boast or incite envy by depicting a perfect life? Try to stay authentic and use your caption to tell the full story behind a photo.
- Don't post images of children or culturally sensitive sites, traditions or locations.
- Follow social media guidelines, refraining from geotagging and trespassing on private or protected land.

National Parks Well Worth Exploring

These under-visited natural wonders provide a quieter experience outdoors.

Piedras Blancas, Costa Rica

Piedras Blancas National Park has a nearly identical list of species as its more crowded neighbor (Manuel Antonio National Park). Dense rainforest creates habitat for toucans, macaws, monkeys, wild cats, and countless colorful reptiles.

Wind Cave, South Dakota

Rolling prairies studded with roaming bison and elk may be what visitors initially see but to take in what truly makes this national park special, you'll need to head underground. Wind Cave, after which the park was named, is one of the longest and most complex caves in the world.

Congaree, South Carolina

Congaree National Park has one of the largest stands of old-growth hardwood trees in North America. Canopies average around 100 feet (30m) but some soar far higher. Much of the park is swampy, so the best way to experience it is by canoe, though a 2.4mi (3.8km) elevated boardwalk allows you to explore by foot without getting your shoes wet.

Wadi Rum, Jordan

An otherworldly park with golden sand dunes and desolate mountains that resembles national parks in the American Southwest, only it receives fewer visitors. In addition to sand trekking, mountain hiking, and jeep safaris, Wadi Rum is famous for its Bedouin hospitality. It's impossible to visit the region and not be offered sweet mint tea. You may also be treated to the best meal of your life, likely a feast that's been cooked underground, a delicious Bedouin tradition.

Wood Buffalo, Canada

Wood Buffalo National Park is both Canada's largest park and the third largest park in the world. Fewer than 4,000 people per year visit the park, home to the world's biggest herd of free-roaming, self-regulating wood bison. Wood Buffalo is also Canada's largest dark sky preserve so it's magical for stargazing. Winter visitors may even be treated to dazzling displays of the Northern Lights.



Dark skies: Joanna Tovia

Reach for the Stars

Why we need to preserve dark-sky reserves

As recently as a century ago, most of us could walk outside at a night and gaze up at star-filled skies. Artificial light in and around buildings, on advertising screens and billboards, plus those lining streets and illuminating sporting venues, means most of us now have to travel to achieve that same sense of wonder.

According to the [International Dark-Sky Association](#), light pollution – the unnecessary spilling of light from excessive brightness and light trespass (light falling where it needn't due to poorly targeted or improperly shielded lights) – means at least 80 percent of us live under 'skyglow', making it impossible to see the stars.

More importantly, disturbing the natural rhythm of light and dark harms animals and ecosystems. Migratory birds take their cues from natural light, sea turtles find the sea by detecting light over the ocean, predators use light to hunt and the hunted use darkness to hide. Artificial light impacts reproduction, nourishment, sleep and protection.

As travelers, supporting dark-sky initiatives is one way we can ensure dark sites are preserved, and that more responsible lighting policies are implemented to reduce light pollution.

There are 130 certified International Dark-Sky Places around the world, ranging from [Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark-Sky Reserve](#) in New Zealand to [Brecon Beacons National Park](#) in Wales, and other pristine spots in Australia, Japan, Canada, France, Southwestern USA, Croatia and Germany, among others.

Your own astro-experience could involve camping under the stars in a Mongolian yurt, sleeping in a star bed in Botswana, or taking a star-filled tour in a dark-sky reserve. If you can't get away just yet, [become a member](#) of your local International Dark-Sky Association chapter and join the worldwide effort to restore the night skies.

Animal Tourism: Is it Ever Ok?

Seeing wildlife up close tops the wish lists of many travelers, but what are the ethical ways to do this? **Georgia Madden** finds out.

A close encounter with an exotic animal while traveling is an experience that's hard to resist for an animal lover. It's big business too, contributing billions to the global economy each year. These encounters might be with animals in captivity, as at a sanctuary or zoo, or in the wild, such as on a safari or a visit to a national park. But is it ethical to see animals in captivity, however impressive the conditions and well-meaning the organization? And is viewing them in their natural habitat necessarily a better choice?



Some animal encounters put profits first

Seeing animals in captivity

Some of the most common places to encounter wildlife are sanctuaries, zoos, national parks and private reserves. While many of these organizations do good work and operate for the benefit of wildlife, that's not always the case. Global animal welfare organization [World Animal Protection](#) estimates there are at least 560,000 wild animals in wildlife tourist attractions across the world and that 100 million people worldwide visit cruel wildlife attractions annually.

"People who fall for the [captive] animal tourism trap usually consider themselves animal lovers. The captive-wildlife tourism industry continues to operate largely because of ignorance," says Laura Weyman-Jones, a spokesperson for [PETA](#). "Tourists don't always see the true nature of the animals' living conditions or understand what it means for an animal to be denied a natural life. Visitors also fail to recognize signs of pain and distress in animals in captivity."

World Animal Protection's Ben Pearson says most cruelty is behind the scenes: "The small, barren enclosures, the chains, the inadequate diet and

lack of veterinary care – and the animal you ride or see in a show has likely gone through a cruel training process to make it compliant."

"It's a paradox," he says. "People's love of animals creates demand for venues that cause animal suffering."

Pearson says many animal lovers unwittingly compound the problem by taking selfies that are shared on social media. "This helps normalize the idea of engaging with wild animals in captivity and creates more demand," he explains.

Seeing animals in the wild

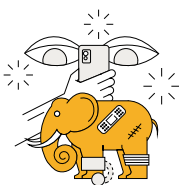
The best way to see wild animals is in the wild where they belong, says Pearson.

Two destinations recommended by World Animal Protection where you can observe animals in an unobtrusive way in their natural habitat are Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan, India, where tourist numbers and behavior are strictly controlled for those coming to see its 60 or so naturally roaming tigers and Great Lakes Marine Park at Port Stephens, Australia – home to around 140 wild bottlenose dolphins. →

"Tourists don't always see the true nature of the animals' living conditions or understand what it means for an animal to be denied a natural life."

"If it's not possible to visit animals in the wild, high-welfare, genuine sanctuaries are acceptable and, in some cases, can even be a positive," he says.

"For example, visiting a high-welfare elephant venue in Southeast Asia that doesn't allow any direct interaction with animals proves that demand exists. This makes it more likely that lower-welfare venues can be persuaded to transition to higher standards and eliminate harmful activities such as riding."



Look for red flags

Zoos offer the convenience of seeing a range of animals in one location. "High-welfare zoos, with great conservation and education programs, that set a high bar around the way people interact with animals are worth a visit," says Pearson. But not all zoos meet the same standards. "Avoid any zoo or wildlife park with tiny enclosures relative to the needs of the species, that neglect basic needs such as a good diet and fresh water, or that hold active-minded creatures in monotonous cages or energetic ones in spaces where they can't run or climb," says [Wildlife Tourism Australia's](#) Dr Ronda Green.

Private reserves, such as those found in Africa, provide an opportunity to see protected wildlife in an open, natural setting (those that offer hunting are obviously to be avoided) and most prioritize animal welfare.

But don't presume that wide, open spaces necessarily equates to a better quality of life for the animals, says Aleesha Naxakis, Media Officer at PETA Australia; "Whether a facility is called a safari park, a drive-through wildlife preserve or a game park, more space does not necessarily mean better conditions."

"Like any wildlife tourism organization, private reserves are a mixed bag," says Pearson. "Some do good work with conservation, education and reintroducing endangered species while others fall far short of the mark. At the end of the day, they all exist for profit."

Do your research

The key to finding an ethical animal encounter is to do your homework. "Go onto the organization's website and see what they are offering, sending a follow-up email for more details if necessary." He advises steering clear of any that offer direct interaction with animals.

"Also be aware that the smart venues – even the bad ones – will talk about conservation as they know that's what their clients want to hear. But don't take it at face value – conduct your own research," he says. "We've all seen what happens when we don't properly protect animals and the world's natural resources; it's up to us to get it right."

PETA's Weyman-Jones suggests asking about a venue's visitation policy. "Most reputable sanctuaries will limit these in order to minimize the impact on the animals," she says. "Is the facility offering experiences to feed, bathe or take photos with animals for extra cash? If so, avoid it."

Check if a facility is accredited by [Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries](#) (GFAS), and check out its social media feeds. "If you see any reference to breeding programs, you'll know that making money is the venue's top priority," Weyman-Jones says.



Tigers are respected in Ranthambore National Park, India

Ethical Encounters With Elephants, Camels and Sharks

Why elephant riding is never ok, how to spot a happy camel, and when it's wise to swim, dive or snorkel with sharks.

There is an air of romance about riding an elephant, but the truth is their spines cannot support the weight of people and doing so all day can lead to permanent spinal injuries. There are further complications from having a chair (*howdah*) attached to their backs. This clunky contraption causes blisters that can become infected.

There are other reasons not to do it too. Organizations, including the [Humane Society of the US](#) and the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums](#), are against riding elephants because of the abuse the animals undergo when they are taught to carry people.

A World Animal Protection initiative also highlighted the sub-standard living conditions elephants typically endure in Southeast Asia, among the elephants used for tourism.

Travelers who continue to ride elephants are often unaware of the issues surrounding the practice. If everyone saw the videos of elephants being beaten with bull hooks or electric prods, it's doubtful they would still be keen to ride one.

Phajaan, or elephant crushing, is a long-standing accepted tradition in Thai culture. This harmful training method is what elephants undergo to become [part of the tourism industry](#). Young elephants are taken from their mothers and confined to a small place, then abused with bull hooks and bamboo sticks spiked with nails. They are also starved and deprived of sleep, in order to crush their spirits and become submissive to humans.

However, this is not the only reason you should give elephant riding a miss. Elephants are a lot like humans. They socialize, have families and friends, feel



Elephant riding in Thailand

pain, sorrow and happiness. When they are in trekking camps, they are often not engaging with other elephants. In some camps, their lives are essentially spent in solitary confinement.

Kinder alternatives

If a tour operator offers anything other than spending time with elephants, you should avoid it. If an elephant 'sanctuary' or wildlife park offers elephant riding, circuses or painting shows, you can be certain the elephants have undergone horrific abuse to get them to where they are.

More than 200 companies have removed elephant riding from their itineraries since 2014. To encourage more businesses to follow suit, choose to visit places with limited or no physical interaction with elephants and do your own research to be sure it's ethical.

Tick of approval

Elephant sanctuaries

Watch elephants roaming, swimming and socializing at MandaLao elephant sanctuary in Laos or ChiangChill in Thailand. See rescued baby elephants playing and being fed at the Sheldrick [Wildlife Trust](#) in Kenya.

The Elephant Nature Park or Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary in Northern Thailand are also reputable.



Be sure the camels you ride are treated with kindness

Animal welfare: Louise Southerden

Should You Ride Camels?

We ride horses; we don't ride elephants. But is it OK to ride camels when we're traveling?

According to the UK-based [Born Free Foundation](#), there's no evidence that riding camels hurts them. Built for tough lives, camels are not called 'ships of the desert' for nothing: an adult camel can travel up to 25mi (40km) a day, carry up to 1,300 pounds (590kg) on its back and survive for 10 days without water.

Because camels are domesticated, not wild, you could argue that riding a camel is like riding a horse, making camel-riding an animal-welfare issue rather than an ethical one. The problem is that in many of the countries offering tourists camel-riding experiences, such as Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, there are no strict animal welfare laws, or they're not enforced.

In 2019, PETA released disturbing footage from Egypt of camels being beaten with sticks and urged tourists not to do camel rides, anywhere. "Such abuse has no place in modern tourism," said Ashley Fruno, PETA Asia's Director of Animal Assistance Programs, at the time.

The case for camel riding

"Our development as a species is intertwined with key species of animals, specifically the transporters: horses, camels and elephants," says Karen Ellis of [Camel Treks Australia](#), which runs multi-day treks in outback South Australia as well as India and Mongolia. Raised by animal liberationists, Ellis lectures in camel welfare internationally.

"Riding camels in particular, because they are desert animals, connects us with some of the world's wildest places," she says. "[Not only that but] interacting with animals can teach people how to treat other animals. It's the same as experiencing wild natural environments; if we lock people out of national parks, how will they learn to value them?"

8 Ways to Show Camels You Care

Follow this guide to ensure the camels you meet on your travels are well treated.

1. Plan ahead

Go with tour operators that have animal welfare policies rather than camel rides with hawkers outside tourist sites such as Petra in Jordan or Egypt's Great Pyramids.

2. Ask questions

Ethical operators will be happy to tell you how their camels are trained and treated.

3. Ride in deserts only

Camels thrive in arid environments and should never be working in tropical, humid, non-desert landscapes.

4. Take a few days

Multi-day camel safaris at a leisurely pace tend to be better for camels than short out-and-back jaunts.

5. Is your camel happy?

Camels tend to make any discomfort known. "If a camel is cranky, it's probably because people have treated it badly and it's traumatized," says Karen Ellis. Camels should look settled and calm. "A relaxed camel chews its cud," she says.

6. Camel care

Do the camels look well-fed? Are their eyes clear? Is their skin in good condition, with no wear spots under harnesses, saddles or halters? If a camel has a nose-peg, look for signs of rough treatment such as bleeding or torn skin. How do the cameleers speak to and treat the camels? Are they gentle or do they shout, whip them or yank on their reins?

7. One person, one camel

Tour operators seeking to maximize profit will often put two people on one camel. Ask to ride your own camel.

8. Speak out

If you believe any camel is being mistreated, tell the tour operator, write a review on TripAdvisor and report it to [SPANA](#) or [Animondial](#), a consultancy dedicated to responsible animal tourism. Travelers have power and standing up for animals creates change.

Marine knowhow: Cassandra Brooklyn

Diving and Swimming With Sharks

How to protect these majestic marine animals from harm during an encounter.

With more than 500 species of sharks swimming in our oceans, there are endless opportunities for travelers to observe these animals in their natural habitats. Though most sharks are generally safe to be around, great white sharks are the exception. Divers eager to encounter great whites in their natural habitat may consider cage diving to observe them up close. During a cage dive, participants are locked inside a metal cage and lowered into the water.

In South Africa, sharks are designated as 'marine tourism species', meaning legally controlled tourism activities such as cage diving minimize disturbances and prohibit the animals from being impaired or injured. This does not mean, however, that every single cage diving operation is ethically run.

Chumming and baiting

Because sharks are naturally timid, some shark-experience tour operators bait sharks by throwing fresh fish and fish scraps into the water, a controversial practice known as 'chumming'. Instead of baiting sharks, scuba diver Torben Lonne, Chief Editor of DIVEIN.com, says responsible operators will track and follow groups of sharks they know are in the vicinity. He suggests asking tour operators about their practices and reading online reviews to see what previous divers/snorkelers have experienced.

No responsible operator should ever guarantee you'll see a particular animal while in the water and, if they do, they may be chumming/baiting to entice the sharks to swimmers. These operators should be avoided, as should any that encourage customers to touch the sharks or otherwise interfere in any way as to alter their natural behavior (swimming too close, in other words, or using invasive lighting and camera gear).



Cage diving with great whites in South Australia

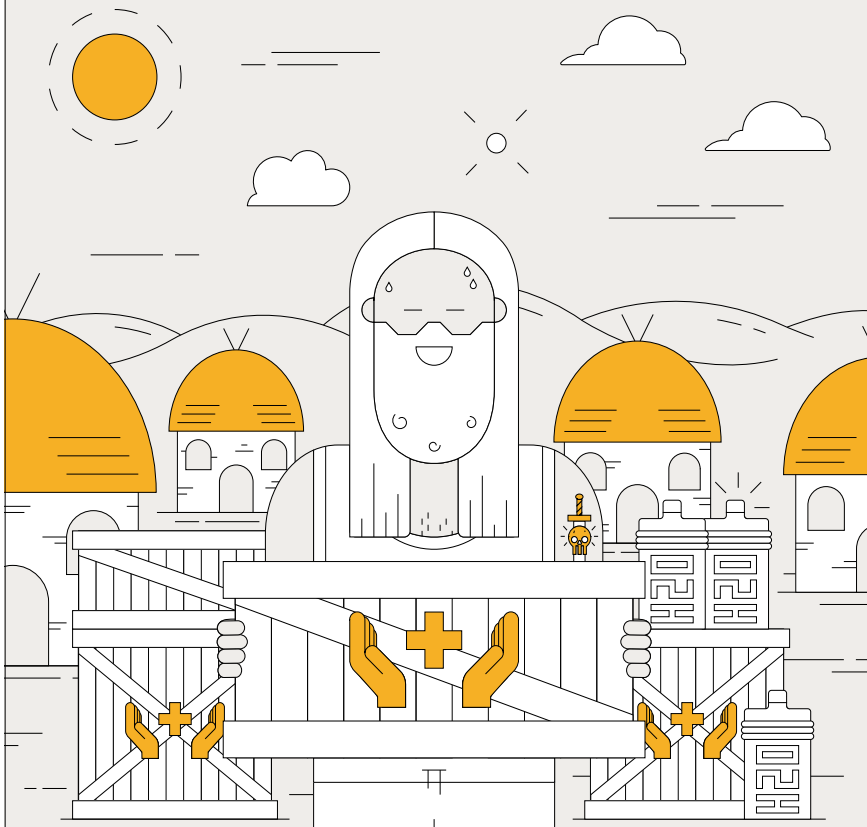


Snorkeling with whale sharks in the Philippines

Find a Responsible Marine Operator

It's up to you to make sure the tour operator you choose has sharks' best interests at heart.

Although choosing a PADI-certified dive operator ensures that you will be guided by an accredited dive operator, it does not guarantee that they will enforce responsible diving practices. According to shark biologist Charlotte Birkmanis, an operator should have a code of conduct visible on their website and on-board and ensure that all visitors abide by it. "The code of conduct would cover restrictions on interaction time, the number of people in the water, and guidelines for tourists when in the water. Specific guidelines should include: no touching or feeding allowed; maintaining a certain distance from the shark; and specifying which direction to approach the shark from." The World Wildlife Federation has a shark and ray tourism [best practice guide](#). Although it's not an official accreditation, divers and swimmers can ask operators if they abide by the guide's recommendations. Education is the key to responsible shark experiences. If an operator is promoting shark dives as a thrilling form of entertainment (and upselling underwater photos with the sharks) but not offering any information about the animals and conservation efforts, then the operator likely isn't a responsible operator. Instead, look for operators with a tie to a research organization or NGO to ensure your money is going where it's most needed.



GIVING BACK ON YOUR TRAVELS

It feels good to help the people we encounter and the places we go when we travel, but arm yourself with knowledge before putting your hand up to truly make a difference where it counts.

Valuable Voluntourism

There are more opportunities than ever to give back when you travel. **Kate Duthie** shares how it makes a real difference.



When we are bombarded with images of poverty, disaster and war, many of us want to do more than watch from afar. We choose to travel to the affected areas to help as part of our own travel experience. But, before you engage in voluntourism, make sure the help you are giving is needed and productive, and not doing more harm than good.

Voluntourism is one of the fastest-growing travel trends, with 1.6 million people volunteering overseas each year. It's big business for travel companies and, in some cases, [unscrupulous operators](#). Avoid short-term volunteering projects – organizations can become dependent on the money they bring, which can lead to the manufacture of projects that address the wrong needs.

"Consultation and collaboration are at the core of our projects," explains Donna Lawrence from [World Expeditions Travel Group](#). "We consult with the heads of a community to learn what their greatest needs are, and we ensure that guests and hosts work alongside each other at the worksite, allowing for the transference of skills."

Helping communities doesn't only mean building a school or working in a hospital; consider lending a hand with charity or community administration, fundraising or advocacy work; organizing petitions, writing letters to politicians and buying goods and services locally or from organizations with a social conscience can also make a real difference. Consider whether [donating your money](#) rather than your time would be more helpful; many communities facing challenges already have the skills to rebuild but don't have the funds to go about it.



The Red Cross distributing aid in Venezuela

The 'right' volunteer experience

Do your research before signing up for a project. Make sure the volunteering project brings real benefit to the community and that the help being offered is in collaboration with local people rather than being imposed on them.

Look for projects that have long-term goals for continued support, and only volunteer to do work you are skilled to do. "If you are in a teaching role, you should be a qualified teacher," says Lawrence. "If you are providing medical treatment, you should be fully qualified to provide that treatment."

It's also important to look for projects that empower the community to take ownership of the project and manage it going forward for their own benefit – give a hand up, not a handout.

Find out where the money you have paid to volunteer is going; good organizations will make sure the bulk of your donation goes to the great cause you are working on. It goes without saying that any volunteering projects that put children, animals or natural environments at risk should be avoided and reported.

Checklist

How to lend a helping hand

Volunteering while travelling can be a worthwhile experience for you and the communities you're helping, as long as:

- The projects you work on aren't taking jobs from local people.
- You're doing it for the right reasons.
- The benefit of your work is felt long after you have left.

Orphanage Visits: More Harmful Than Helpful?

Helping out at an orphanage could be helping an industry that takes advantage of vulnerable children, writes **Kate Duthie**.



The idea of helping orphaned children is popular with many travelers, but mounting evidence suggests that the most vulnerable in our communities aren't benefiting at all – but are being exploited and damaged by the experience. Most volunteers who want to work with orphaned children come from backgrounds of comparative wealth, and genuinely hope their involvement will help the children, while also enriching their own travel experience.

According to charity [Save The Children](#), the number of orphanages in some countries has increased, while the number of orphaned children has not. In [Cambodia](#), for example, the number of residential care institutions has dramatically risen in the past 10 years, while the number of orphans has significantly reduced.

"Well-intentioned tourists visit orphanages and donate money," explains [LearningService.info](#) Co-Founder Daniela Papi-Thornton. "In direct response to these good intentions, an industry has formed to profit from vulnerable children. In many cases, the children are not orphans; they are taken from parents who have been sold a story that a better life awaits them in the city, where they will be given an education and be well cared for. At its very core, this amounts to child slavery, and travelers should avoid participating in it."

Another potential problem is allowing travelers access to children, unchecked, which raises an important issue of child safety; not everyone visiting orphanages has the children's best interests at heart. "It's crazy



Children being cared for in a Cambodian orphanage

Instead of choosing to volunteer at an orphanage, research and support organizations that work to keep families together.

when you think that orphanages are allowing foreign, unskilled and transient strangers intimate access to children," says Liz Manning, [Intrepid Travel's](#) Responsible Business Manager. "It's a major child-protection risk."

There is also the issue of the effect encounters with an ever-changing group of carers has on children. "The constant rotation of adults coming in and out of vulnerable children's lives also creates attachment disorders," says Manning, "the effects of which are lifelong and inter-generational".

Travelers signing up to help at an orphanage no doubt hope they will offer an extra pair of hands to benefit the day-to-day running of the place. In reality, this is often just a way of eliciting an emotional connection from →

volunteers who then feel compelled to donate. "This is what fuels the proliferation of orphanages and the need to fill them with children," says Manning. "Research has found 80 percent of orphans have at least one parent at home."

For orphanage owners and managers, this is how they make money, and while the volunteers might feel social gratification, the children almost certainly don't. Children are not and never should be tourist attractions, and yet many orphanages are profiting from the good intentions of well-meaning volunteers.

How can travelers help in a different way?

While stopping orphanage tourism suddenly could have a hugely negative impact on the communities that are supported by the income, tourism operators could gradually phase out their support, to give communities a chance to find another way of funding themselves. This is where volunteers could be of great help.

"Individuals who have relevant expertise, like a child protection background, or experience working with children who are or have been in residential care, can play an important role in supporting the organizations' transition to better models of care," says Manning.

If communities can see a life without the need to put their children in care for financial gain, they are less likely to do it. Instead of choosing to volunteer at an orphanage, support organizations that work to keep families together.

Make a point of eating, shopping and buying tours and experiences from small family businesses so putting their children into an orphanage does not become a financial imperative.

Research and donate to organizations that work to return children to their families or communities.

When more of us are informed about the orphanage industry, we will help each child realize their right to grow up in a family or familiar community.



Emergency relief: Chui Hsia Yong

Post-Disaster Travel

Traveling to destinations after the acute phase of a natural disaster has passed can be a big help.

Although it's not advisable to head for the nearest site of a natural disaster in full fury (unless you are a qualified disaster-relief professional invited to lend a hand in emergency operations, you will definitely be more of a hindrance than a help), traveling there as soon as it's safe to do so can make a big difference to disaster-impacted communities struggling to bounce back.

Destination recovery

Natural disasters – whether wildfires, floods, mega-storms or earthquakes – can destroy the very features of the landscape and environment that make a destination so appealing to travelers, but it's important to recognize that the destruction is often contained to a small area. There may be no need to avoid a whole country or region when only a portion of it has been affected.

Hurricanes regularly sweep through the Caribbean islands, for example, but a hurricane may cause minimal damage or leave untouched all but the islands directly in its path. Even if an island is hit, it may be a glancing blow that leaves one side of an island in tatters and the other unharmed. If airports and roads leading to where you want to go aren't damaged, there may be no reason to stay away. If you'd like to help a destination recover post-disaster, ask yourself:

- Is it safe?
- Is it a useful time to go?
- What kind of activities do I picture myself doing there?
- Will I harm anyone by just being there?

Remember that a post-disaster context is by definition a place where people are vulnerable, and visitors should be sensitive to the situation. Tour companies offering to take you to disaster-stricken areas for a look should be avoided. No one likes to be made into a spectacle.

Responsible Travelers' Manifesto

At World Nomads, we believe our mindset, choices and purchases can make a big impact on people and places when we travel. Be the best traveler you can be.



01. Be curious

Treat travel as a learning opportunity first and foremost. Keep your eyes and your mind open. Indulge your curiosity, be brave, find your own journey of discovery.



02. Appreciate not appropriate

Research and ask questions about a place before you go and while on the road. Strive to understand and respect cultural and religious nuances and customs. Appreciate, don't appropriate, traditions from other cultures.



03. Travel smart

Travel smart. Remember that just because you are abroad doesn't mean you are invincible, entitled or above the rules (you're not).



04. Seek meaning

Seek meaningful travel experiences and connections. Make an effort to be more than a spectator; engage and participate whenever you can. Learn a few words of the local lingo; your efforts won't go unnoticed, and neither will a smile.



05. Don't endanger or exploit

Avoid any activity that treats people as a tourist attraction in and of themselves. Don't do anything that might endanger or exploit the local residents – people and wildlife alike.



06. Acknowledge and grow

Acknowledge that tourism has a dark side. Don't knowingly support this underbelly. Grow from any past mistakes.



07. Share your stories

Share your stories, your expertise, what you've learned. But more importantly, be a good listener. Every single one of us has something to contribute. Explore the differing perspectives that you encounter, spend time trying to actively understand them.



08. Tread lightly

Choose the path less-traveled, and tread lightly along the way. Offset your carbon footprint, use less plastic, make the most sustainable choice wherever you can. If you think somewhere is amazing, chances are future generations will too – make sure it's there for them to experience.



09. Buy locally and responsibly

Use your travel dollars for a positive impact. Question where the money goes before you book – make sure the locals are benefiting from your travel choices. Buy locally and responsibly, barter graciously.



10. Give back

If you can give a little back to the places and communities that you've traveled to and visited, do – those few dollars can go further than you may imagine.



11. Be agents of positive change

Most importantly, be an ambassador for yourself and your fellow nomads – you are more than just travelers, you are also powerful agents for positive change and the choices you make before, during and after a trip matter.

Travel Insurance: Why it Matters to Responsible Travelers

At World Nomads, we believe traveling responsibly includes making sure you have the necessary back-up if things go wrong on your trip.

To be completely transparent, we sell travel insurance. But that's not why we think it's a good

idea. Travel insurance isn't designed to cover every scenario and situation, it's there to help with the specific events outlined in your policy that may go wrong while traveling. All World Nomads policies include coverage for:

- Medical
- Cancellation
- Baggage

World Nomads offers two plans: a Standard Plan and an Explorer Plan. Each has different benefits, limits and sub-limits of cover. When considering travel insurance, you should consider the destinations you plan on visiting and the activities you're likely to do, then pick the policy with the level of benefits to match.

You may also need to add adventure activities to your quote and, if you'd like the level of cover the Explorer Plan offers, you'll need to add it when you purchase your insurance because you can't upgrade or add extra activities mid-trip.

Medical coverage

Illness and injury are common reasons travelers make claims on their insurance. Whether you're on the 'road less traveled' or visiting a trending destination, medical events can happen. They range from minor incidents requiring local medical assistance to life-altering medical events and even death.

Medical assistance can be very expensive overseas, particularly in countries such as the US, and can bankrupt a traveler or their family if they're not adequately insured. Medical benefits vary between travel insurance



It's the law

Part of being a responsible traveler is respecting different cultures and, more importantly, local laws. No matter what your passion, if you do something illegal in the name of a good cause, it's still illegal.



policies but, generally, they may help with locating medical help, transport to a local medical clinic or hospital for treatment if needed, and repatriation if you're seriously injured. In the worst case, travel insurance policies may pay for the repatriation of your remains or funeral costs.

Global pandemics such as COVID-19 can change how safe it is to travel to and within countries – and often at short notice: stay abreast of relevant government warnings and check what is and isn't covered in your policy before you set off on your trip.

It's also important to remember that some countries' medical systems are fragile and have limited services and capability. That's why some destinations require proof you have travel insurance before you visit, so you don't become a burden on the local people and economy if you need medical help. →

Getting off the beaten track

Sure, following the path less traveled is exciting, but be aware that some travel insurance policies do not cover exploratory expeditions, new routes, hiking in remote or inaccessible areas, or traveling to dangerous places.

Do your research and understand the local environment and political landscape before you set out. Part of being a responsible traveler is respecting different cultures and, more importantly, local laws. No matter what your passion, if you do something illegal in the name of a good cause – it's still illegal.

Whether it be scaling a building, protesting outside a government building, or flying a banner on a local statue in the name of your cause, if you get injured, then you're unlikely to be covered. That's because many travel insurance policies won't cover illegal events of any kind, even if it's legal to do it in your own country.

Let's face it, ending up in prison is probably not the overseas experience you were after anyway.













Volunteering: what's covered

World Nomads travel insurance allows you to participate in a range of volunteer activities and vacations, from summer-teaching programs to clean-water projects. We're strong supporters of paying it forward and giving back – and what better way to strengthen communities, forge meaningful connections and open your eyes (and arms and hearts) than contributing to a worthy cause? As travelers, we can make a real impact where it matters.

However, we don't cover every kind of volunteer experience, and some may have limitations or be excluded from our insurance policies altogether.

So, take the time to read your policy carefully and check the terms, conditions, limitations and exclusions. If you're not sure if it's covered, [contact us](#) and we'll do our best to help.

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Meet Our Contributors

Our writers are responsible world travelers bound by the desire to truly understand the countries they visit, and to leave a place better than they found it.



Louise Southerden

Louise is a multi-award-winning freelance travel writer who's passionate about simple, sustainable travel. She lives and writes by the sea in northern NSW, Australia.



Craig Tansley

Craig has spent the past 19 years circumnavigating the globe writing stories for publications from *Condé Nast Traveler* to *The Australian Financial Review*.



Chui Hsia Yong

Until recently, Chui Hsia lived in Brussels and considered it the best city in the world. She now calls Oslo home, and considers *this* city the best place to be.



Sam van Egmond

As a freelance writer, Sam loves to tell the stories of people doing good in the world. She specializes in sustainability, covering everything from slow food to ethical design.



Amelia Hungerford

Amelia is a Sydney-based travel writer and editor. Her love of languages and history has led her across the globe, from the villages of Japan to the mountains of Canada.



Rachel Shue

Rachel is a freelance writer who has lived in Laos, South Africa, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Lebanon. A pro at negotiating border crossings, she is now based in Spain.



Kasey Clark

Kasey is a content specialist with a passion for food, wine and travel. Born in NYC, she enjoys bringing her diverse background and wanderlust to her storytelling.



Ivy Carruth

Ivy is an American-Australian content creator specializing in travel, lifestyle and social issues. Her blog, *Travel in Twos*, inspires couples with ideas to experience the world together.



Georgia Madden

Georgia is a lifestyle writer who was born in Australia but raised in Hong Kong. She spent her childhood traveling with her family around Southeast Asia, and now lives in Sydney.



Liz Duman

Liz writes about sustainability, travel, food and books. She has lived in cities all over the world, including London, New York and Sydney, and now calls Australia's Blue Mountains home.



Cassandra Brooklyn

A travel writer based in New York City, Cassandra founded *EscapingNY*, an off-the-beaten-path travel company. She leads group trips to Jordan, Mexico and Cuba.



Amy Jones

Amy Jones is a writer and photographer who co-founded the global animal rights photojournalism group, *Moving Animals*. She tells the stories of animals around the world.

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