

AN INTRODUCTORY FACT SHEET FOR THE  
INDEPENDENT TRAVELER.

What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.

Where do you fit in?

The importance of the traveler in the ecotourism industry cannot be underestimated. You, the traveler, have an enormous effect on the travel industry through the choices you make. This fact sheet aims to provide you with information that will help you to become a more responsible traveler. Acting responsibly increases your enjoyment and aids in the protection of the host countries natural and cultural environments.

Education.

Educating yourself about your destination, prior to departure, is an extremely important side of good ecotourism practice. Learning about the history, culture, language and natural environment of your destination area aids both cultural interaction and appreciation of local ecosystems. People are more likely to socialize if you show a prior knowledge of their country and home. Prior knowledge of local ecosystems means you are more alert to different animals and plants to look for. Information is available from local libraries, your Tour Operator, National Tourism Organizations, and Visitor Centers on arrival.

During your trip.

The manner in which you conduct yourself on vacation determines this impact you personally will make on your chosen destination area. Essentially you can make a significant difference through maximizing your positive impact and minimizing your negative impact on the host natural and cultural environments. It is important to remember that travelers are guests in the host destination.

Travelers can help to conserve the environment by making sure that their economic impact directly benefits the local population. Question who will benefit from the choices you make. Ensuring that the money you spend goes to the local inhabitants means that they will want to conserve the natural environment that has attracted you to that destination.

After your trip.

If you observe any management problems during your trip you should inform the relevant government authorities and non-profit organizations.

## HOW CAN YOU BE AN ECOTOURIST?

### Culture

Your behavior on vacation needs to be altered for each different location you visit. Travelers should be sensitive to local customs concerning areas such as culture, religion, photography and tipping.

### Financial Benefit

You should try, where possible, to consume local foods and use public or locally owned transport to maximize the amount of financial benefit to the host destination. When buying souvenirs you should consider whether the goods are locally made. Do not purchase goods produced from endangered species.

### Local Authorities

Check with local authorities, before visiting natural areas, for site-specific regulations, guidelines, maps etc. Offer to pay for access to these areas, even if a fee is not required, as your contributions will help preserve the natural attraction for future visits.

### Fragile Environments

Be prepared...This motto can be applied to a wide range of areas. It is good practice to find out what facilities a destination offers, be it on a day trip hike or a week long wildlife observation expedition. Are these facilities environmentally sustainable? It is also useful to take maps and field guides with you on your trip.

Take care when planning a trip to a fragile environment, to take into account the peak times for visitation (season, day in week & time in day). Avoiding these times will increase your enjoyment of the natural attraction and also avoid exceeding the areas' carrying capacity.

Adopt low-impact camping and hiking behavior, these practices protect wildlife habitats and help maintain the quality of experience for others. Take particular care to protect fresh water resources.

### Viewing Wildlife

Use binoculars or other optical aids where possible, when viewing animals in their natural environment. This establishes distance between them and yourself, dramatically reducing your impact.

While viewing wildlife move slowly and quietly. Noises often scare animals unnecessarily. Notice how many more varieties of wildlife you see and hear, and how many types of plants you can observe. Avoid using animal attraction devices.

### Waste Management

Do not leave any litter, better still take a bag with you and pick up litter on your visit! If you want to smoke in natural areas take your butts with you. Leave no trace of your visit, dispose of all trash properly. Try to minimize the amount of disposable products you take with you on vacation. Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

source: <http://www.ecotourism.org/>