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Sustainable tourism checklist for guides/travel leaders





Travel leaders and guides are the front-line players in the tourist industry. Thanks to their knowledge and interpretation of the sights and culture at the destination and their competence in the field of communication and service, they have the capacity to transform a tourist visit from a tour or visit into an experience.

The extent to which travel leaders/guides succeed in transforming a visit into an experience depends on their intercultural skills. This implies that they must be well informed both about the culture that is being visited and the culture of the visitors. The guide/travel leader may only succeed in building a bridge between the tourist and the local population in this way. This is possible, for example, by pointing out local habits that differ from the customs of the visitors. In this way the guide/travel leader can help the visitor to understand and interpret local standards and values better and can indicate to them what appropriate behaviour is that does not go against local customs. Besides intercultural skills, a travel leader/guide must also have skills to deal with natural resources such as water and energy as well as possible. Given that there are more and more shortages, it is of vital importance to be economical with them. Moreover there is still the economic mainstay that the destination country and its population actually profit from tourism. It is clear that travel leaders/guides can play a key role in making tourism more sustainable. They fulfil the role of connecting element between the tourists, on the one hand, and the local population, economy and nature at the destination, on the other.

Travel leaders/guides have the vital task of encouraging the tourists, but also the accommodation and other players at the destination, to sustainable behaviour and actions. They are the visiting card of the travel organization and by giving feedback concerning the (un)sustainable practices at the destination concerned, the programme can be made more sustainable.

The sustainable tourism checklist is a tool to help guides/travel leaders with this essential topic.

PREPARATION

Immersion in sustainable tourism questions before starting the guide term is essential for giving good information to the participants during the guide term.

- ❖ Become familiar with the problems of the city/region and the actions that have been taken to solve the problems.
- Learn about the initiatives for promoting sustainable development in the region or city to be visited.
- Cooperate with partners, such as environmental organizations, nature education centres, cultural associations
- ❖ Examine whether you can involve local inhabitants in planned activities
- ❖ Become aware of environmentally friendly accommodation, for example from a database or certification mark

PERSUADE PARTICIPANTS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

- Set a good example (otherwise not credible)
- Do not come across as preaching
- ❖ Give examples of positive and negative effects of tourism on the destination
- ❖ Choose a suitable moment (start of the trip or when the subject comes up)
- ❖ Dose, foster understanding, keep it light
- Distinction necessary (take a position) and desirable behaviour (more nuanced, stimulate discussion)
- ❖ Show appreciation for positive behaviour/commitment
- Avoid cultural stereotypes

TRANSPORT

- For short and medium distances, the bus and train are environmentally friendly and comfortable alternatives to the car and plane.
- An internal flight is quicker, but by travelling with a local train or bus you are guaranteed adventure, you see a lot of the country and you can make contact with the local population travelling with you. Therefore try to avoid internal flights.
- Use local means of transport and public transport as much as possible. This is often cheap and is a special means of travel.
- ❖ Ensure that chartered vehicles are suitable for the number of participants to prevent the vehicle being half full and relatively more emissions per passenger.
- Ask the local transport organizations not to leave the engine running when the passengers are not in the vehicle. Buses can generally be cooled down or warmed up rapidly, just before the passengers board.

STAY

- Be aware of environmentally friendly accommodation, for example from a database or certification mark
- ❖ Give information about the sustainable measures that the accommodation concerned takes in the field of water, waste and energy savings, social rights of the staff, cooperative arrangements with local development organisations and suppliers (for example of local foodstuffs).
- Other sustainable tips:
 - Do not leave taps running unnecessarily
 - Take a shower instead of a bath. Some hotels already remove the bath plug in advance. Exceptions apply for the elderly and parents with children, who can collect the plug from the reception
 - > Switch off the lights and heating/airco when leaving the room
 - > Use towels and bed linen for more than one day

Many (distant, but also some nearer by) countries have to contend with water and/or electricity shortages. Encourage participants to take this into account.

Practical example 1: Maho Bay, US Virgin Islands

Maho Bay Camps consists of 114 huts in the Virgin Islands National Park. These huts have been built on piles and connected to one another by stairs and raised paths. Erosion is completely prevented, as is damage to flora and fauna. Because construction is done completely by hand and no trees are cut down, nature has remained intact. Through the use of natural construction materials, such as wood, the resort is difficult to see from the outside. Moreover the tropical woods ensure sufficient privacy and cover. Because of its location the wind gives sufficient cooling in the huts and air conditioning is unnecessary. The shared bathhouses are equipped with water-saving and compost toilets and showers with a handle, so that less water is used. The effluent is caught in a recycling system with which vegetation is irrigated. Rain water is also caught (approximately 1.4 million litres per year) to provide the launderette, cleaning and the bathhouses with water. Moreover only 100% biologically degradable cleaning materials and detergents are used. As a result of all these water-saving measures a guest in Maho Bay Camps uses on average 94 litres of water per day instead of 1140 litres per guest in a normal resort. Concerning energy-saving measures, the resort uses hydroelectric power and solar energy for warm water, light and the "solar oven". Because of water and energy-saving measures Maho Bay Camps can operate cheaper than other resorts.

It is important that the guests are involved in energy and water-saving measures at the resort. At Maho Bay the guests are involved in the following manner: On arrival every guest is informed about the recycling programme and they are also stimulated to sort their waste themselves during their stay. There are separate containers for aluminium cans, glass, plastic bottles and paper. Some of these materials are re-used by the "Trash to Treasure Art Center". For instance, there is a glass studio where artists make new objects from old glass. Guests can attend these glass blowing demonstrations.

Maho Bay Camps are a perfect example of how accommodation can be managed sustainably.

For more information, see www.maho.org

NATURAL RESOURCES

- ❖ Be economical with natural resources, such as fossil fuels, gas, wood (coal), and water, certainly where there are shortages. Inform participants about this.
- For cooking, the preference is for gas, then charcoal (bought from the local population) and as the last choice dry wood.
- Prevent/limit the pollution of open water. Preferably use biologically degradable soap.
- Report any cases of waste of natural resources somewhere to the travel organisation and propose environmental protective measures yourself.

DRINKING WATER AND FOOD

Prefer drinking water from the tap or pump (if there are no health risks) to plastic bottles of mineral water which produce a lot of environmentally harmful waste. There are reliable methods for filtering water (including filters, chlorine tablets,

- iodine drops, micropur). Check the possibilities carefully and inform the participants about them.
- ❖ Use local foodstuffs instead of imported products as much as possible. It has less impact on the environment (less transported/cooled, etc.), it helps the local economy and it is a nice way to taste the local specialities. Exceptions are meat from protected species or overfished species of fish.

WASTE POLICY

- Gain insight into the waste policy at the destination concerned and inform the participants about this.
- ❖ Make arrangements with local partners and participants: cause as little environmental pollution as possible



- Limit the amount of waste (for example, by reuse, minimising disposable articles)
- Use existing possibilities for waste treatment (return used batteries)
- Make a distinction between the various types of waste: biologically degradable (back to nature), recyclable waste (reuse of bottles & cans), burning other waste (such as toilet paper and plastic), otherwise it stays hanging around
 - Appeal to agreements between the travel organisation and the local agent. If they do not exist but are desirable, you can pass this

on to the travel organization.

SPORTING ACTIVITIES

General note: Consider the possible impact of sporting activities on the surroundings. Think of aspects such as environmental pollution, noise nuisance for people and animals, safety, disruption of the natural surroundings, erosion, etc. inform participants about this and how they can limit that impact. Also encourage the organizer of the activity concerned to pursue a sustainable tourism policy. By maintaining contacts with other travel leaders, you can examine whether the sustainable tourism policy is also implemented outside your own organization.

Diving and scuba diving:

- Explain the vulnerability of underwater life
- Work with environmentally aware diving schools
- ❖ Ask the diving instructor to tell the group what is done in the area to protect the underwater life
- ❖ Leave underwater flora and fauna intact: touch nothing and take nothing away
- Use buoys instead of casting anchors

Another water sport, like *jet skiing* is very environmentally unfriendly since it damages the underwater flora and fauna, pollutes the water and air and also causes a noise nuisance for other holiday makers. It is better to encourage non-motorised water sports such as *sailing and (wind) surfing*.

Winter sports:

Stay on the pistes and never ski off-piste to prevent the danger of avalanches and reduce the disruption of vulnerable nature

- Avoid helicopter skiing and snow scooting, there are many enjoyable environmentally friendly alternatives such as snowshoeing, snow biking, snow tubing, sleighing and cross-country skiing.
- ❖ Adhere to the waste policy: do not throw waste from lifts or leave it on the slopes.
- Alternate activities: less crowding on slopes, enjoyable alternatives (see above). Or for example go for a walk or to a spa. With other activities than skiing there is also often more contact with the local population and they can for their part profit more from tourism.
- Enjoy local delicacies: This contributes to the small-scale cultural landscape of the mountain farmers and helps the local economy.

Swimming with wild dolphins:

- ❖ Let the dolphins take the initiative and not the other way around
- ❖ Boats must keep their distance, reduce the noise and speed around the dolphins
- A maximum of three boats can observe the dolphins at the same time. If there are more boats shorten the observation period and make space for the waiting boats.

Animal attractions:

Animal attractions are occasions where you can observe animals that normally speaking live in the wild. This can be zoos, but also safari parks, circuses, aquariums, butterfly gardens, animal hospitals and animal orphanages that are open to the public. Captive animals can also be observed in hotels, in shopping centres, at exhibitions alongside the road (these activities are frequent examples of animal maltreatment), in falcon hunting centres and in reptile and bird parks. Since animal attractions are dependant on wild animals they have a responsibility to their public to contribute to conservation of the animals in the wild. Public interest in the protection of nature can be increased in this way.

- Obtain information on site which animal attractions make a contribution to nature conservation and which do not
- Avoid badly managed animal attractions (low welfare standards and poor animal care)

Motorized activities:

Motorized activities (such as quad bikes and jeep safaris) destroy the vegetation, disturb the wildlife and cause air pollution through the excessive use of fossil fuels. Rather choose rather environmentally friendly alternatives, such as bicycles and horse riding.

VISITS TO NATURE RESERVES

Obey the park rules concerned and communicate them to the participants:

- stay on the paths (zoning/route)
- > do not disturb flora & fauna
- explain changes in flora and fauna as a result of climate change
- observe opening times
- > use a local guide
- maximum number of participants per group
- > follow park guidelines concerning waste management
- do not make any unnecessary noise
- > be careful with fire (camp fires are often prohibited)
- > keep away from wild animals and do not feed them
- important: the bad example of others is no excuse for bad behaviour



- Explain about nature conservation in the area, so that the vulnerability of nature is understood and a basis is created for protecting nature.
- Visit less frequented areas to spare heavily frequented areas.
- ❖ Report abuses to the agency concerned and your own travel organisation
- The above points not only apply to nature reserve, but also to UNESCO heritage sites for example

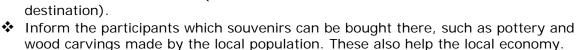


CITY VISITS

- Use non-motorised and/or public transport, such as a bicycle (taxi), scooter, tram and bus.
- ❖ if present, use sustainable transport initiatives introduced, such as the bicycle taxi.
- Pay a visit to the popular sights at a quiet time, to reduce crowding at the attraction concerned and to increase the participants' enjoyment
- Give the participants a unique experience by immersing them in the local culture, making contact with the local population, trying the local delicacies and, if possible, visiting local festivals and markets. Make it interactive, so that the participants share in the local life, for example by trying a local craft.
- Explain initiatives which indicate the sustainable character, such as UNESCO protected heritage sites, accommodation with a fair trade or eco label.
- Advise participants about habits and customs such as clothing regulations when visiting religious shrines.

SOUVENIRS

- Communicate about bad souvenirs at the destination concerned. Emphasize underlying interests: the protection and conservation of nature and culture
- Two categories: endangered animal and plant species (more than 30,000 worldwide) and objects belonging to the cultural heritage of a country
- Cultural heritage: archaeological, historical, religious, art and everyday objects. Pick nothing up and take nothing away: cultural heritage belongs in the country of origin.
- Trade is prohibited: fine and seizure at customs checks
- ❖ For all endangered species, see the Internet sites of CITES or the WNF (for each travel destination).





CONTACT WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION

- ❖ The keyword is *respect*: for other lifestyles, beliefs, local customs/traditions, manner of dress, etc. Adapt to this as much as possible and ask the participants to do the same
- Contact with the local population may be encouraged: both parties can learn from it and it promotes understanding and respect for other cultures.
- ❖ By visiting *local events and festivals*, the participants can immerse themselves, as it were, right into the culture concerned as observers, which is often felt to be an extraordinary experience and can also reinforce the feeling of solidarity with the local population. Check in advance if your presence is wanted and make clear agreements about what is expected of the group.
- ❖ Encourage the participants to make their *expenditures as local as possible*. They will then have a much more valid experience and also contribute to the local economy, for example by eating in local restaurants and shopping at souvenir stalls. But also, for example, switching from coca cola to local fresh fruit juices.

- ❖ Give advice about *clothing regulations*. Make a distinction between desirable (clean, covering clothing) and necessary regulations (such as head covering, torso and legs, and taking off your shoes when visiting mosques and temples).
- ♣ Have an insight into the *cultural and religious rules of behaviour* at the destination concerned, such as the manner of greeting, eating customs, contact between persons of the other gender and other local norms and values. Communicate about these to participants so that instructions and regulations can be obeyed.
- ❖ Staged authenticity (acted authenticity): The lifestyle or characteristics of the cultural identity are adapted to the wishes of the tourists. Some cultural aspects are thereby commercialised and reworked into so-called native shows. Inform the participants about this and consider it can also be otherwise, where the local population are involved as equals in the cultural exchange.

PHOTOGRAPHY

- ❖ Ask permission before taking photographs, obey prohibitions on photography.
- Explain that local people have the right to refuse to be photographed and explain which cultural, religious or personal motives may play a role.
- Debunk the idea that tourists have the right to photograph because they paid for the trip.
- Never offer to pay money for photographs yourself. Try to avoid this and look for other solutions.



❖ Participants taking the time to make contact before taking photographs is a sign of respect. If participants agree to send photographs, encourage them actually to keep to these agreements.

CULTURE SHOCK

This a situation of mental discomfort, caused by over-tiredness in combination with an excess of travel impressions. Tips to deal with this:

- ❖ Avoid busy places where there is a lot of poverty.
- Adjust the travel tempo (with sufficient moments for rest).
- Look for places to cool off in mountains, at lakes/rivers and at the sea.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AND INSTITUTION VISITS

- ❖ Proposal for a visit must come from the care institution/project itself. Make clear agreements concerning what is and what is not possible to minimize disruption. For example to raise awareness of a social problem or to raise funds.
- At projects that are not care related, such as the sewing work of a womens' cooperative or a tree nursery, there is less objection to a visit from outside. For instance, by cooperating with local environment/nature related NGOs, participants can pay a visit to their projects and support them financially by means of donations.
- Always make arrangements in advance concerning the visit (guided tour, donation). Enquire where the structural need is.

❖ If participants want to support a local project, separate it from the travel organisation and bear in mind that no false expectations are awoken.

Practical example 3: Kilimanjaro coffee excursion, Tanzania

In the green fertile area at the foot



of the Kilimanjaro we camp at a camping location that has been set up with the support of Sawadee Reizen and the Green Development Foundation. The local coffee growers who saw their income decrease because of the dramatic fall in

world coffee prices and are searching for other sources of income have been trained as guides. They now lead visitors with great enthusiasm around the green coffee fields where the red coffee berries give colour to everything and show us the complete process from berry to a cup of coffee. Accompanied by local guides we take splendid walks past fields of banana plants and small-scale coffee plantations. Women from the village prepare a traditional meal for us. The income from these overnight stays and excursions goes directly to the coffee growers.

Source: www.sawadee.nl

COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

Travellers may pay a visit to a local community and be a part of daily life, without causing a disruption. The community profits (work & income) from the arrival of tourists. The level of comfort is often minimal but on the other hand it produces real contact, which can be a captivating and instructive experience for both parties.

- Organise your visit to a community-based tourism project via the local organisations that offer this
- Prepare the participants well, so that they have realistic expectations and behave respectfully towards the host community.
- ❖ By explaining the background of the project, about the programme and the arrangements made (such as compensation and photography), the visit can make a positive contribution to the project.
- Visits are arranged so that more people can profit from tourism without there being pressure on certain villages.

VISITS TO NATIVE PEOPLES

Native people are the original inhabitants of an area and often live close to nature, as they have done for centuries. The way of life is centuries old, as is the language, the traditions and rituals. They often have a marginal position in society. They also come increasingly into contact with tourism, which puts their culture under even more pressure. Take the following points into consideration when visiting native peoples:

- ❖ Always ask for permission in advance to visit native peoples
- ❖ Inform the participants thoroughly so that an interactive exchange of cultures can take place instead of a purely unilateral contact.
- ❖ Be alert for negative effects and report these to the travel organisation
- An organised visit is preferable to an unexpected visit so as not to disturb daily life. Agreements concerning price and photography are made, both parties know where they are and a guided tour is often given.
- ❖ Use a skilled local guide as much as possible who is part of the people who will be visited so that both parties can profit from the meeting. Cultures are not static and through globalisation cultures (both 'host' and 'guest') change even faster. Guides must be able to interpret these changes correctly.

Initiatives are increasingly being taken to raise the awareness of the local population (including native people) to tourism using cooperative associations with various parties, such as NGOs, local governments and the local travel industry. By being informed of these initiatives, the participants can be informed about this and a visit may possibly also be made.

BARGAIN ABOUT MONEY

In many non-Western countries products have no fixed price. Bargaining about the price is natural there.

- ❖ Tell the participants how they can play the bargaining game positively (with humour and respect).
- Wherever possible, give guidelines and insights into the real value of products. There is no right or wrong amount: what counts is that the buyer and the seller are both happy with the bargaining.

GIVING TIPS

Tips are generally an indispensable supplement to low local wages in non-Western countries. This means that a relatively high tip is expected from travellers in proportion to the low wages. Giving tips must be considered as a direct form of reducing poverty: the money goes straight to the guide/cook/driver and their dependents (family) also profit.

- Give information about the background of low wages and seasonal labour so that participants understand about giving tips. The giving of a tip is not an obligation, but persuade participants of its importance.
- Follow the guidelines concerning the amounts of tips from your travel organisation (insofar as there are any). Guidelines often differ for each destination, service provided, duration of the travel, size of the group, etc.
- Make a clear distinction between tips that can be paid from a common group pot (common activities) and tips to be given individually (to chambermaids, luggage porters).

BEGGING

In many countries beggars are part of the everyday scene, and in some places tourists a favourite target. That can produce extremely confrontational situations. Do you encourage the participants to give something or rather not?

- Use the criterion of whether begging is part of the society or if it is learned begging behaviour that is solely aimed at tourists.
- ❖ In some countries supporting beggars is prescribed by a religion or philosophy of life, for example gifts to monks.
- Children are sometimes exploited to beg. Be alert to extreme forms of exploitation of children and do not cooperate with this.
- The well-intentioned giving by tourists encourages begging. Discourage participants expressly from giving sweets, balloons, etc. to children.
- ❖ If participants still want to give something, do this via the parents, teacher or local guide. A donation can also be given to a school, orphanage, hospital or a nature protection project.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

- ❖ Inform the participants about the cultural difference between love, marriage and relations
- If sex tourism occurs at the destination concerned, inform participants about this, which places can better be avoided and that child sex tourism is illegal and can lead to prosecution at the travel destination, but also in Belgium.
- ❖ If there is a serious suspicion that a participant is guilty of sexual abuse of a minor, the travel organisation must have a protocol that you as a travel leader can fall back on. You must never make difficult decisions with serious consequences on your own, but in consultation with your travel organisation.

Practical example 4: ECPAT against child prostitution

In many developing countries surviving is a daily struggle. Frequently there is no work, as

a result of which there is also

almost no income to

buy food. Young children are increasingly sold by

their families to brothels in

the large cities. Children have

little say in this and all their

earnings go to their pimp.

Child sex tourism occurs widely

in Asia (including Thailand and the Philippines), South America, the Caribbean islands and Africa. There are sex tourists who go to their destination specifically to have sex with minors. But the largest group of sex tourists is just on vacation at their destination and come into contact with the children, for example when they go out. Frequently these tourists do not know that these girls/boys are under 21. The international organization ECPAT is committed to fighting the commercial exploitation of children. This organisation tries to make the travel industry, governments, education and tourism aware of this problem, so that measures can be taken to reduce child sex tourism. An important role has been reserved for the travel industry in the fight against child sex tourism. The Accor international hotel chain supports ECPAT in protecting children from sexual exploitation by means of policy and the provision of information to customers.

Tips for after the trip:

- Report abuses that have occurred during the trip to your own travel organisation so that measures can be taken. Examples: illegal dumping of waste, disruption of flora and fauna, wasting of natural resources, lack of respect in dealing with the local population, etc.
- ❖ Propose measures yourself for the burning questions at the destination
- ❖ Describe how the participants react to information concerning sustainable tourism and where necessary, suggest points for improvement.
- Propose local sustainable tourism initiatives to the travel organisation. Perhaps extra attention can be paid to them in the travel brochure.
- ❖ Investigate whether there are possibilities for including less visited regions/activities in the programme so that there is a more varied offer for the tourist and better distribution of tourist flows. There is therefore less crowding in the popular areas and more people can profit from tourism.
- ❖ To distribute the tourist flows over the year, tourism in the early and late season is an answer. Check which activities might allow this.

Interesting Internet sites:

www.fairtourism.nl

www.propoortourism.org.uk

www.unwto.org

www.wttc.org

www.toinitiative.org

www.international.icomos.org

www.ecpat.be

www.viaterra.org

www.ecoclub.com

www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk

www.tourismconcern.org.uk

www.paseo.nu

www.greentravelmarket.info

www.eceat-projects.org/

www.ecotourism.org

www.planeta.com

www.unep.fr/greenpassport/

www.responsibletravel.com

whc.unesco.org/en/list/

whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabletourism

www.irresponsibletourism.info

Fair Tourism Foundation Tourism against poverty

World tourism organisation

Forum for representatives of the tourist sector

Sustainable initiatives of travel organisations

Protection of cultural heritage

Network against sexual abuse of children

Tourism to country areas

International ecotourism network

Tour operator projects sustainable tourism

Campaign against abuses in tourism

Visits of Fair Trade organizations

Marketing service for sustainable tourism

Sustainable country tourism in Europe

International Ecotourism society

Platform for ecotourism

Sustainable tips for tourists

Offer of sustainable holidays

UNESCO world heritage list

UNESCO sustainable tourism programme

Forum about the negative impact of tourism